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# VILLAGE SERMONS

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## Preached at Whatley

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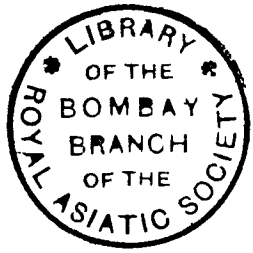
BY THE LATE

R. W. CHURCH, M.A., D.C.L.

SOME TIME DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S, RECTOR OF WHATLEY,
FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE

A.d-72

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# I

## THE BIBLE A GIFT OF GOD

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."—ROMANS xv. 4.

TO-DAY'S collect[1] reminds us of one of the greatest and most important things given us by God, to prepare for the coming back of Christ. When we are led to dwell on the thought of the second Advent, it is natural to turn to that Holy Book of which the second Advent is the burden, and promise, and last object. It is from the Bible we learn that Christ will come back; and when we consider all that we have in the Bible to help us to think and feel as we ought about His coming, it is a plain and wise lesson of the Church to say as it does in the collect, "Now go with increased interest and hope to your Bible; now that you are thinking of the return of Jesus Christ, think also of what you possess in the Bible to instruct and comfort you against that certain but most awful time, that time of greatest hope and greatest fear, and pray that God will give you grace to make the right use of your Bible."

[1] The Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent.

One of the uses of Advent ought to be to make us examine ourselves about our Bible reading, and to stir us up to be more earnest, and careful, and hearty in studying it; because it is the one book in the world which is the visible sign and consequence of Christ's having been here, and the continual token and pledge that He is coming back. "The Scriptures," as St. Paul says, "were written for our learning," our learning about what has been done; that, by the comfort and encouragement given in them, we might have hope.

There are two things worth dwelling upon about the Scriptures, when we read them with the thoughts and feelings which Advent brings; that is, with the thoughts and feelings called up by the belief that Jesus Christ has really been with us, and is as really coming again.

1. Think of the Bible then, first, in this way. It is all that now remains to us of the actual teaching of those by whom the world received the word and the hope of God. When we read the Bible, we read the very words of those who were by when God's mighty works were done; with whom God spoke when they were wrought; who were present, and sharers, in all the great beginnings of religion among men. In the Old Testament we have the very words of God's prophets and messengers, Moses, David, Isaiah,—men who had God's secret, and by whom He prepared the way for the coming of His only Son. In the New Testament we have the very words of those who were with His only Son when He came, or who were directly sent and charged by Him to set up His Faith, and His

Church; the words in which they tell what they heard Him say, and saw Him do; the words in which they tell us what they understood Him to mean, what they learnt from Him, what His Spirit made them think, and feel, and do. Here, in the Bible, we have what they have left of their reports, and records, and ways of teaching; and besides these remains of their actual teaching, we have no other.

We have a great deal besides to help us to the truth and knowledge which God meant us to have. God filled His Church with light, and doctrine, and wisdom; and much of it has come down to us, and we enjoy it now, and every day. But it has come in another shape, and not in the very words of those who were the ministers and eye-witnesses of the Word at first; the Prophets, and Evangelists, and Apostles, whose very words we have in the Bible. Christian truth has been preserved in remembrance by preaching, by teaching, by writing, by worship, by psalms and hymns, by the life and spirit of holy men. To be used, to be profitable, it must be spread abroad, and turned to account, by men thinking about it, and applying it, and drawing lessons from it. And so, as I say, the Bible is not the only means by which Christian truth is preserved and taught in the world. But the Bible is all that remains of the actual, very teaching of the first teachers.

There is Christian truth of the most precious and certain kind in the Catechism: no one can doubt its being Christian truth; no one can doubt its value; and it would be hard to put so much truth in shorter and plainer words. A man who is not scholar enough to read the Bible, may learn all saving

truth in simpler words in the Catechism which he was taught to say by heart when he was a child. Truth is truth, wherever it is, and by whatever means it is taught; and the Catechism is the record and monument of Christian truth, which is in its safe keeping. But there is this difference between the Bible and everything else, however true, however much to be trusted and valued, that the Bible contains the actual words, at first hand, of those who saw and heard Jesus Christ; and of no other book in the world, however precious, can this be said. In the Bible we seem to reach back to the very days of the Son of man: we hear what His own companions heard Him say: we know what they saw Him do, how He appeared to them, what they learnt from Him. We come straight into His presence; we follow about with His Apostles, as they taught, and preached, and wrote their letters.

Of course we cannot doubt that they said a great deal more than we know of now. How many words of Jesus Christ are lost to us! How many things must He have done, how many lessons must He have given, how many acts of mercy, and tenderness, and love, must He have shown, which we would give anything to know, but which are lost to the world; known to Him, known to the Saints in Glory, but which will never be known on earth now!

And so with His Apostles. We have heard who, and how many they were. We know what labour they went through, what work, daily and hourly, of explaining and teaching, and writing, and building up the truth. But of all this, so important and fruitful at the time, how much has been completely

lost to us! Of all St. Paul's labours and preaching what a comparatively small portion must his epistles, as we have them, be; how much must he have said that we can never know!

Well then, what does remain, how unspeakably valuable and weighty and dear to us ought it to be. And, as I say, what we have in the Bible is all that is left us of St. Paul's preaching, and of his Master's. It is their very words, and it is all that we have of them. Surely, if we remembered this when we read or hear the Bible, we should read it and hear it with more care, more humbleness of mind, more reverence, and more hope and comfort.

2. And this brings me to the second point on which I wish you to think.

The one great feature observable in the Bible is the way in which it throws us forward on things to come. It is the one everlasting, permanent, perpetual prophecy in the world. The Bible is essentially a forward-looking book, a book which, from first to last, prophesies, and turns our thoughts onwards to the future. In this it is different from all other books, and in this it is meant to be our strong encouragement and comfort.

I don't mean, merely, what is quite true, that the Bible has a great many prophecies in it; that it is half made up of prophetic writings. It is this, and it is also very much made up of historical writings, —writings about what is past, and has been done, and is over. But besides all this, the Bible, as a whole, has no meaning except we think of that time to come, to which it keeps pointing us, to which it is throughout bidding us look for the fulfil-

ment of our hopes, to which it is continually urging us to press forward, waiting, watching, preparing. All that is now, it declares, must pass away; not only man's life, not only kingdoms and states, not only all the glory and power of man; but the very heavens and earth around us are to make way for something greater and better. All that has been done, has been done only for the sake of that which is to come; not only the long history of God's dealings with the world, His discipline of mankind, His wonders and judgments, and all that He has done in the glorious days of old, but that mighty and inconceivable act, the Word made flesh: the everlasting Son of God crucified, and raised from the dead. And all that He has ever done, all that His grace and love has accomplished for the world, and even now accomplishes, is but imperfect and unfinished: nothing is to be finished, no hope is to be satisfied, here. Men's minds and hopes, their treasure and their perfection, are all carried forward to the life to come. The Bible, every time we look at it, is the witness and protest to us, that our business is to look forward: that what man is here for, in this life, is that he may prepare for something, beyond measure and imagination greater, which lies in the future, in eternity. It is the perpetual witness of that which is in such strange contrast to everything here: it is the witness of our Immortality.

Christ is indeed to come. He is come. Wonderful and awful thought. God has been made man. God, made man, lived, and died, and rose again for us. But even this is, if we may dare say so, little in comparison with what is to be. How indeed can

we doubt that something infinitely greater *must* be, when we have seen so much done. This is what we believe, this is what we are now recalling to mind, and trying to fasten and deepen in our minds.

Now let us remember. In our Bibles we have all that remains to us of the actual words and writings of those who saw Him when He was last here. We have their very words; and we have them only in the Bible.

And next, let us remember what the Bible, in its complete shape as one book, is specially meant to remind us of. There it is on our shelves, on our tables, in our hands, ever pointing onwards from the time present to that which is to come. From all its many and various sounds the voice is heard as one: —You are made for the future, for that which is not yet, but shall be hereafter. So let us read it, as if we heard the words of those who had seen and heard Christ. So let us read it, as discerning in every word the promise and the prophecy, which never ceases, either in open declaration or still more solemn undertone. "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." And so may God give us patience and comfort of the Scriptures, so may He help us to embrace in them, and hold fast by them, the blessed hope of everlasting life; so may our hearts learn to echo the last prayer of the Bible—"Behold I come quickly: even so come, Lord Jesus."

## II

## THE DISCLOSING OF SECRETS

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."—1 CORINTHIANS iv. 5.

THE Bible teaches us that there is to be, not only a day of judgment, but a day of making known all secrets, and bringing to light all hidden things. When our Lord comes back it will be, not only to reckon with His servants, not only to pass the everlasting sentence on all that we have done, but to show what has been in all hearts and thoughts, and to take away the veil of darkness, which covers so many things in our lives from the knowledge of all the world. We all of us have our secrets: and we must be prepared one day to give them up. "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." These are the words of Christ, and they are repeated over and over again. And St. Paul is constantly reminding us of the same thing. It is not only that every one of us "shall give account of himself to God." It is not only that "we shall all

stand before the judgment seat of Christ." It is not only that "God will render to every man according to his deeds." But it is also that "God, in that day, shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel." "Some men's sins," he says, "are open beforehand, going *before* to judgment, and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid." That is, not only, nothing, good or bad, but is to come under God's judgment; but nothing, whether open or hidden, notorious or unknown, but, in that day, is to be published.

Now it is impossible for us, at present, to understand or imagine what all this making known of secrets will be like, and how it will be done. And it is no use trying to fancy anything about it. All we can be sure of is, that it will be something very different from what we can conceive of now. But the thing itself is certain; the thing itself is plain enough. There is no difficulty in understanding what is meant by bringing to light the hidden things of darkness, and drawing away the veil from all secrets of men.—We know what it is when something which we wish to hide is found out. We know what it is when something which we have wished to keep in the deepest darkness gets abroad, and is in every one's mouth. Now this is what the Bible tells us is to happen with all secrets in the day when the Lord comes to judgment. Secrets may be kept for a long time, but they cannot be kept for ever. The day must come at last when they shall be known: we cannot tell by whom; but, at any rate, by those from whom

people wished to hide them. Who are to be the witnesses of that great exposure,—before whom all our secrets are to be dragged into light and our souls laid bare, it is useless to guess. All we know is the awful fact,—the awfulness of which we can partly imagine by what we feel *now*,—that we shall have to give up everything that lies hid in our hearts and knowledge; that it will be impossible to hide anything, or keep it secret any longer; that if there is anything which we should be ashamed should be known, we shall no longer be able to help its being discovered and disclosed; that then every man will be seen as he is; the truth about everything will be made clear, the light will have poured in, brighter than the sun at noonday, on all dark places, and all dark things, and words.

One part of this great revealing of secrets will be the discovery of men's real character, the making known what each man really is. *Now*, this is only half known. We think that we are something or other; and other people think of us according to their views. But all the time *we are* what we *are* in the eyes of God; that which God sees us to be, *that* we *are*, whatever different thing we may fancy of ourselves, or others may fancy of us. *Now*, we mistake about ourselves; and do not know what our neighbours have found out about us. We think ourselves one thing; they, with their sharper eyes, or more impartial judgment, see that we are another. We, perhaps, think ourselves humble; they see that we are vain. We think, perhaps, that religion is the main thing in all we do; they see that, behind all our religion, our actions are worldly and selfish.

They see that we are cowardly, and we fancy ourselves manly and brave. We never doubt that we are true: they see that we are slippery and insincere. They see that we are ill-natured and ill-tempered, while we never imagine that such a charge can be made against us. We dream that we are full of zeal for something altogether out of ourselves, while they see clearly that we are all the while following our own spirit, and seeking our own ends. We do not half know ourselves; but in some things, perhaps, we know ourselves only too well. We know, perhaps, that we seem better than we really are. There are ways of thinking and feeling in our hearts which we keep in the background, which we know will not bear the light, which we do our best to make a secret of:—ways and feelings which we indulge in, and which yet we know are unchristian and wrong:—ways and feelings with which if any one were to charge us, we should be very angry, but yet which we cannot make up our minds to struggle against and conquer and give up; which we hope and try that men shall know as little as possible about, but which, between God and our conscience, we know are too deeply part of ourselves.

Now, to all this the day of the Lord shall put an end. Then, all mistakes, all disguises, will be at an end. We shall be forced to know and see what we really are. If we are conceited, and selfish, and self-indulgent, and untrue, we shall be made to know it. We shall see ourselves as we have looked to other eyes. And all those secret faults and sins which we have, perhaps, taken so much trouble to wrap up and hide, which we have known of ourselves, but

hoped that no one else suspected,—these, too, must be shown in their true light. We must for once—we must at last—be seen as we are. We shall feel that wilful blindness to ourselves, that all shows and pretendings, are at an end. Our real character will be made clear. The truth about us will have to come out. As Almighty God knows us, so we shall, at last, know ourselves, and so we shall be known by all who then see us.

This must be one part of that great revealing of secrets: the "making manifest the counsels of the hearts." But the Bible speaks more distinctly and pointedly of another—the bringing to light not merely the general character of men, but particularly certain secrets which especially avoid the light, the "hidden things of darkness."

What does the Bible mean by that? Can it mean anything less than this, that the veil which now rests on so many secret sins of men, the veil which in this world it is possible to keep drawn over them, even to the grave, that veil will then be torn asunder, and all those secret sins will then be as manifestly displayed as the most public sins that were ever committed—the sin of Pharaoh, of Saul, or of Judas Iscariot?

Think what this means. We know what it is to stand convicted of some public sin which a man cannot deny. We know, in the case of others, what is the horror, the confusion, the miserable shame of such a sinner, when his sin is brought home to him. But the righteous sentence of God makes no difference in the end between public and secret sins. The difference between public and secret sins is a very

real difference now. But the Bible warns us that it is merely a difference for the few years of our life, and that as soon as life here is over, it comes at once to an end. There are no secret sins to God. There will be no secret sins in the day of judgment. All sins then will be so far on a level, that all will be known just as they were done. All will be made known. All will be made manifest in the brightness of that day.

Is this so? Is it indeed true that the most hidden things of darkness must at last be made plain, the darkest secrets of men's sins be made known? Could any one reasonably expect that it would be otherwise, if God is all-seeing and righteous? Why should sin, because it is secret for a time, be spared the shame and punishment of being brought to light? But we are not left to guess. The words of the Bible which tell us of the coming of our Lord to judgment, tell us as plainly that He comes "to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and to make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

And if it must be so, if all secrets must at last be known, the prospect is a serious one, for all who have a witness within them, that among the secrets to be revealed in that day will be found some of their own. I am not speaking now of innocent secrets; of the many numberless things which we naturally and rightly wish to keep to ourselves—and, from no wrong feeling, would be ashamed and distressed that others should know. It is not of these that the Bible speaks, when it speaks of the "hidden things of darkness." It speaks of *sin*, of

what has been done wrong: it speaks of what men keep secret, and blush at, because they know that they have done wrong. If we have any secrets of this kind,—sins which we have been able to keep from being known; sins which we, in a sort of way, triumph in, as being certain that they can never come to light in this world; sins into whose mystery we need fear no one ever breaking; sins which we need never talk about, or fear any one asking of;—if we have any of these secrets, these are the secrets of which the Bible speaks, as doomed to be made known; these are the secrets which we must one day meet again before an eye which none can avoid.

For these secrets are those hidden works of darkness of which it is said that Christ is to come back to bring them to light. There can be but one way to escape this terrible revealing of our secrets. There can be but one ground of hope that they may at last be buried, and brought against us no more. If they are repented of *here*; if here, where we have done them, we in truth forsake them; if here, where we have dared God's eye and God's judgment, and trusted that what man did not know of, *no one* would ever know of; if here, where we have triumphed in our secrets, we confess them with all our hearts to God; if here, where we have flattered ourselves that we are safe, and masters of our secret, we feel and own the wickedness and shame of our secret sins;—we may hope that they may be forgiven and taken away; and we may hope that what Christ has forgiven, He will not bring up against us to our confusion in the day of judgment. But, till we have repented of them,—as long as they are a secret

between us and our conscience, and we feel comfortable only because they are not known to man,—so long we must lay our account to meet them once more, where there is no hiding them.

And how should this thought of the discovery of all hidden things of darkness restrain our thoughts and actions? Oh, let us not make to ourselves any of these dreadful secrets of sin, which we would almost rather die than man should find out, but which, after all, must be found out, and laid bare at last. When we are tempted, and are doubtful, let us say to ourselves, This must all come to light at last: am I prepared to face the disclosure? dare I do it, with the certainty of all being one day known?

Oh, let us have no secrets with God. Let us live with our life and conscience all day long open before him. Let the secret sins of our past days be no forgotten or dissembled matters between us and God. Let us be sure that, if there is anything of which we feel that we dare not think of it and God together, dare not think of it and of its one day being made known,—this is a warning that we had best have nothing to do with it. Let us live with the most certain law of God's kingdom ever before our thoughts: "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed"; "nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad."

## III

# THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."—ISAIAH lv. 6-9.

GOD'S ways are indeed higher than our ways, and His thoughts are above ours. We cannot search them out, we cannot come near them. We do not need the Bible to teach us this. The world we live in, the things we see and know around us here, are enough to make us confess that His ways are wonderful, above our understanding, and His thoughts beyond our reach. All round us we see the works of His hands, great and small, in the depth and in the height; and, in the smallest as in the greatest, we see ways and thoughts, power and wisdom, which the thoughts of man try in vain to comprehend. He made the sun, and the stars, and the light, and no understanding of man can conceive the power by which they were made, and are kept safe. And He made the grass under our feet, and the millions of living beings in the air and in the water; but how and why He

made them all, the mind of man cannot understand. Men are continually searching into His wonderful works, and thinking to find out something more of the ways and thoughts by which God has ordered the things which He has made; and yet what they do find out only shows how far off they are from coming to the end of the wisdom and power of God.

And if we are taught this every time that we open our eyes on the world round us, and think of what we see, much more is it forced upon us in matters higher than this wonderful and beautiful world in which we live, by that which the present season brings before our minds. The ways and thoughts of God in the worlds of the sky, or in the doings of nature, are indeed wonderful; but what are their wonders compared with the wonder of "God manifest in the flesh"; God coming down to take on Him the nature of man, that He might be with men in their life, and share with them in their death, and win them to love Him, and to become one with Him for evermore? What wonder of the sky or of the deep can equal the wonder of Him, who made all these things,—whose are the paths of the stars, and the might of the lightning and the life of every living thing,—becoming for us incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and being made man? What ways are those, what thoughts are those, which counted the salvation of human souls so precious, that the Maker of those souls saw no other way of saving the creatures which He had made, and which had sinned against Him, but sharing their weakness and their sorrows, being born a child like them, that like them He might also die? Who

among men could have conceived of such a way of saving men?

Wonders, indeed, had been done for man ever since he first sinned against God, and God's love was exercised in recovering him. Wonders too, greater than any that had yet been seen, had been promised by God's messengers, the prophets. Words had been heard of old, such as we repeat to-day: "A Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel;" "God with us." "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Words, indeed, to raise men's hopes, and make them look out for some great thing. But I do not suppose that these words were the same to those who first heard them as they are to us. To them they were a glorious, but still a dark promise; to us they are no longer dark but light; —light in all the glory of an unhoped-for deliverance, found to be true indeed. However much the prophets understood of them, we know that their eyes were not allowed to see the things which we see. They knew, indeed, that God would do wonders to save mankind, but they little thought of the wonder that He was going to do, in sending His own Son, God of God, and Light of Light, to become man, to be born as we are born, to live as we live on this earth.

What, indeed, are all the wonders that God had done before for His people, compared with this one, that God was made man, and dwelt among us? We

sometimes speak as if the wonderful thing was, that He should come in such lowly guise, not as a great king and conqueror, but as a mere teacher of the people; that He should be so humble and without show, content with a poor man's lot and with the form of a servant, instead of appearing in the glory of the Messias, or with the greatness of a prophet like Moses. We dwell on the humble lot of His mother, and on the manger, and the inn, and the swaddling clothes at Bethlehem, and on the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. It is very well to do so, if we thus make our hearts feel more really what our Lord and Master was when among us. But the wonder of all is the great fact itself, that He *did* become man at all. It is not so wonderful really that when He became man He also took with manhood poverty and obscurity and contempt and shame. For what is all that man thinks most about, all that he values most highly,—riches, and honour, and comfort, and pleasure,—in the sight of God most high? If He became man at all what would He care about such things as these? That He renounced all this, that He was poor, and despised, and humble, is but a light thing compared with the overwhelming marvel and mystery that God became man, and was made flesh for us. Who can imagine of this rightly? Who can fully take into his mind all that is meant and said in those few words, God became man?

Look at the world around you, and all that is in it,—all the countless millions of living souls that are in it, that have lived and died in it since it was first made: look up at the sky, and count the stars, and remember that each star is a world, and think who

it is who made and upholds all these, and knows what is going on in every corner of them ; and then imagine that Being, clothed in flesh, standing a man at your side. And think of Him, drawing human breath, fed by human food, speaking human words like yourself, being Him who at the very same moment keeps all these worlds in being, and who was in existence, perfect, all-wise, all-good, in an eternity without beginning, long before those worlds were made. Take in that thought, fix your mind on it, try to get hold of something of its surpassing wonderfulness ; and, after it, all other wonders will seem hardly worth naming ; even the wonder of His lowliness and humiliation will seem but small compared with the wonder of His having been born man at all.

Surely God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways. Surely it was no mere way of speaking, when it was said that, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. To-day, at least, we ought to feel it to be so indeed ; to-day, which shows us how much God cares for our salvation ; to-day, which reminds us what His thoughts were for accomplishing it, what way He took to bring us to Himself. To-day, sounds once more God's promise of pardon to man, and the pledge that that promise will be kept. To-day, once more, by the marvellous grace and honour done to our race by the Incarnation of His Son, God calls on us to come to Him and be saved. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near : let the wicked

forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

If we doubt whether He means what He says to the full,—if we doubt whether He is in earnest in calling such as we are to come to Him, whether He can pardon as abundantly as man has sinned,—here is the answer to our unbelief: He does not work by the rules and manners of men. His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. He shows His desire for our salvation, and His readiness to accept us, in doing what none could have imagined possible, in sending His Son to take our nature upon Him, and to become man for our sakes. Here is the pledge of His faithfulness. Here is the assurance that none can doubt, that He loves the souls of men with the love with which He loves His only-begotten Son. When we will not come to Him, He comes to us. When we refuse to seek Him, He comes Himself to seek and to save us. He does not send, He does not call merely. He comes down from heaven, and lays aside His glory, and speaks to us face to face, with the words of man, with the fellow-feeling of man, with the affectionate love and tender earnestness of man. He who made the light, and rules beyond the stars, comes and calls on us, and speaks to us with the simple plainness with which a father speaks to his little children, or a little child appeals to grown men.

Once more Christmas is come, to show us how inconceivably God has loved us; loved us with a reality and earnestness that even, in the contempla-

tion of His love, makes us tremble to think of it. What, think you, must be the glory destined for those for whom the Maker of the world became a man on earth? What must be the certainty and the depth of ruin to those who, when such an offer has been made, such a step taken for their salvation, yet refuse it? How can we estimate the greatness of that blessedness which God keeps in store for His servants, when we see what He was willing to do in order that we might attain to it? His ways, indeed, are not our ways; and He, whose way was so far beyond man's imagination to bring us this blessedness, must have ways far beyond our thoughts too, to make His promise good in the kingdom of heaven. And how can we suppose that human thought can penetrate and measure the awful completeness of that overthrow of happiness and hope, which awaits the impenitent and the ungodly, when we see what their Creator and Judge was willing to submit to, in order to turn their hearts to Himself, and bring them to repentance and peace with God? What can be imagined of the fate of those who have been so loved, so sought after, and yet could not be found?

O seek Him while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. By all the mysteriousness of His inconceivable love, by all the strange marvels of His way of redemption, seek *Him*, whose ways are so wonderful, and whose thoughts so unfathomable. Now you know that He has done all this to win your love, to bind your hearts for ever to His sacred name. Seek him while His arm is stretched forth to shield and guide and bless you. It will not always be so. The wondrous ways and gracious thoughts which

God has towards you now, must, if you are *not* won and touched, and made better by them, give place to ways and thoughts, equally wonderful, but wonderful in the judgment and vengeance to which they will prepare the way. If you are delaying your repentance, if you are putting it off to a more convenient season, measure your danger and guilt by those wondrous doings which we are celebrating to-day. By those ways that are so much higher than our ways, by those thoughts which are so much higher than our thoughts, listen to the call which invites the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and which promises that the Lord will have mercy on him, and that our God, who came Himself to save, will abundantly pardon him. Let none of us turn away from this gracious call. Let none of us think that we do not need it; that our heart is already right, that we have sought and found God, and need not listen to words which call on us to seek Him still. Surely we, all of us, need Him. Surely none of us have found Him, as He might be found by those who seek Him earnestly. Surely none of us have yet found to the full the extent of that pardoning and healing grace which we need so much, and which He has in such abundance to bestow. Think how little our lives have been like the lives of Christ's disciples. Think of all the burdens and troubles which have grown on our consciences during the busy or the idle days which have passed over us since last Christmas. Do not we want pardon for them, and an ease from their weariness and vexations? And to whom shall we go for it except to Him, who took

our flesh that He might share its burdens, and feel for its temptations, and heal its wounds? To whom should we go but to Him who came down and lived among us, to show us how He loved us, and to win us to love Him? This day reminds us how near He is to us, even our brother, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. This day reminds us how easily He may be found. This day we rejoice that the world has such a Creator and mankind such a Saviour. Oh, let us show that our rejoicing is not a vain rejoicing, by answering His call of love, by coming to Him, that He may make our hearts and lives His own.

## IV

# THE THREE CHRISTMAS-TIDE FESTIVALS

"These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."—REVELATION xiv. 4.

CHRISTMAS DAY is followed, as you know, by three other holidays. The three days that follow it are kept in remembrance, first of St. Stephen, next of St. John, and then of the Innocents. St. Stephen, the first Deacon, was the first martyr also, the first who laid down his life for Christ's sake. St. John was the beloved disciple who leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, who outlived all his companions, and died at last, not as most of them died, by the sword or the cross, but quietly in his bed in a good old age; who wrote the last of the four Gospels, to whom was shown the Revelation of things to come, and the vision of the New Jerusalem; the favoured servant of his ascended Master, the preacher of love. The Innocents were those young children whom King Herod slew in Bethlehem, when he was seeking to take the life of the young child Jesus; little children who had done no actual sin, who were not old enough to know evil from good, but who yet were old enough to do Christ service, to be made of His household and family, and to glorify Him by their deaths.

Now, why is this? Why is Christmas thus fol-

lowed by these three holidays? Why are they put close together, one after another, as a sort of carrying on the thoughts and feelings of Christmas Day? Why, out of all the other saints of the New Testament, should St. Stephen, St. John, and the Innocents be specially chosen to be, as it were, the train of companions and followers appointed to wait on the Saviour of the world at His birth in Bethlehem?

I suppose that these days are kept along with Christmas Day, and immediately after it, to show us instances and examples of the fruits among mankind of the coming down of Christ to take our nature on Him. By being born man, like ourselves, He hallowed and consecrated our nature. By coming among us, and joining us in fellowship with Himself, He raised men to heights of holiness and grace to which they had never reached before. He came to exalt the sons of earth. He came to purify them, to strengthen them, to show them a new way of love unknown before, to lift their thoughts and hopes above this life, to fill them with the spirit of power, and with a heavenly mind; to make men—sinners and degraded—like in heart and spirit, like in deeds and suffering, to Himself. This He began to do when He was born for us. So with the remembrance of His birth follows also the remembrance of the great things He wrought in changing so wonderfully the sinful nature of men.

With Christ, the Restorer of mankind, are shown us at Christmas examples of His work, instances of what He has indeed done among men by coming in the flesh, instances of the restoration which He came down to bring about in the world. Stephen

was a man like ourselves, yet Christ's coming in the flesh raised him so high above himself that he gladly shed his blood for the truth, and with his last breath prayed for those who killed him. John was a common man like one of us, but Christ's coming in the flesh so raised and purified and sanctified him that he was able to speak of the love of God as no other man did, as only the Lord Himself spoke of it. The Innocents were but children like other children, yet Christ's coming in the flesh brought a blessing on that death which seems the saddest fate that can happen to a child, and turned Adam's curse and the penalty of Adam's sin into a crown of glory, even for speechless infants, unable yet to know their Saviour.

These three days show us instances and examples of Christ's restoring and cleansing and refining that nature which in Adam had been ruined and lost; instances of what His coming down among us in the flesh could do to make men like Himself, and fit for His glory. They were joined on to Christmas Day as the marks and trophies of His Christmas victory.

Further, they were joined to it to show us that Christ's blessing is not confined to one way of serving Him, to one sort of people, but is meant for all sorts and conditions and ages; that He has saved and sanctified all; that He has place in His kingdom for young and old, for small and great. He came not to call the old only, but the young and strong, in their prime of health and hope; not the grown-up only, but also the children and infants at the breast. His band of saints, His army of martyrs, His household and Church, is not a human company or army where only a particular sort of men is wanted and

picked out; He takes all sorts in who need salvation, all souls which His Father created to be happy and holy for ever. The fruits of His Incarnation and Redemption will be seen, not in one class or division of mankind, in one form of human nature, but manifold and varied as the differences of men. This is one reason why these three days follow Christmas. His saints will be young men cut off in their prime, yet having in a few days fulfilled the work of many, like St. Stephen; yet not all like him. Others will be like St. John, filling the whole of a long life with the glory and love of God. Yet not all like these even, men of the highest stature and noblest mould that man can attain to; but others also, among those whom the world despises as weak and poor natures,—children in age and children in understanding, too feeble or too unknowing to fight for Christ, but gentle and sanctified enough to be His witnesses, and to suffer for Him in quietness and silence.

Further, these three days follow Christmas for another reason: to remind us that there are many different ways of serving Christ appointed to us, many different gifts, many different ways of glorifying Him; yet all are of God, all belong to His one great purpose of sanctifying and saving man, all help on towards His kingdom. St. Stephen's glorious death does not make St. John's long life and peaceful end less Christian, less acceptable, less becoming to the beloved disciple of a crucified Master. What St. John did and St. Stephen endured, with full knowledge of the reason why, with hearts and feelings drinking to the full the cup of suffering given them to drink, did not make the death of the Inno-

cents less precious in God's sight, though they knew not why they suffered, and felt nothing but the last momentary stroke of the murderer's sword. After such a life and such a death as Jesus Christ's, after those awful words of His about taking up the Cross, about him who loves his life losing it, and him who hates it gaining it, it might have seemed that no death but that of St. Stephen could be fit for a follower of Christ, could duly glorify God. But there were others also as Christian and as holy. St. Stephen's zeal, St. Stephen's boldness, St. Stephen's swift and early death, like that of a soldier in the beginning of a great battle, gladly endured to show his companions the way to fight and conquer, was indeed following his Lord's steps, and doing what his Lord had taught him. It was one high and excellent way, but not the only one. It was as much following in Christ's steps, and doing what Christ had taught, patiently to tarry through a long and weary life, seeing friends drop off by death year after year, ready to suffer, yet still left ; left the last of all whom he had known, with new faces and new ways all round him,—and to die alone. And that was St. John's quiet, noiseless, monotonous (as many would call it), dull way of doing Christ service. Yet he was of all others the disciple whom his Master loved. Early to die, or long to live, are both ways which lead to glory. To die in public, to live unknown, to die a death with which the world shall ring for ever, to live a life by which no one seems the better, and in which no one is interested but the one or two friends near us, equally may turn out at last to have been that path of the righteous which shines more

and more unto the perfect day. Nay, not only that. To be cut off in childhood, without even the opportunity of knowing God, without having yet named His holy name, or bent the knee before Him, sorrowful as such a death, useless as such a life seems to man, it is not so to God. It is the life and death of His own little child, of one whom He has taken into His family, and sealed as His soldier and servant at baptism. Even such a one dies, though we cannot see how, to his Father's glory; even such a one is a fit follower in the great company of faithful souls of the Lamb who died for young and old; even such a one, like the Innocents of old, is fitly named as a companion of Him who was born for us at Bethlehem.

Again there is another reason why these three days should have been chosen out of all other saints' days to be joined so closely to Christmas. They not only show us that Christ came to bless, and to make use of all sorts of persons; that persons of very different gifts are equally useful, and equally able to do Him service and glorify His Name; but they also put before us, in human examples, those special graces which He came down on earth to show the perfect pattern of, and which were all joined together and united in His person. What was it that marks that life of Jesus Christ which began at Bethlehem? Was it not, in the first place, His readiness to die, to give His life an offering and sacrifice to God? Was it not, in the next place, His unfathomable and overflowing love? Was it not, in the third place, His purity and innocence, and with that His lowliness and humility, as of a little child? And did He come merely to show us

an instance and image of these things, which we were only to look at and admire, but not to follow? Or did He come, that what He was, *that* His servants also should be; that as He was in the world, man should also try, and in time learn to be? Surely He came, He showed us all this vision of holiness and love, that we might be like Him. And He did not come in vain. Men—sinners like ourselves—have been like their Saviour, God-like, Christ-like men. It has been found possible for man to fulfil the purpose for which He came on earth and took our flesh on Him. By being with Him, by following His steps, men have become indeed like Him; have become saints. That is what these days remind us of. They show us reflections,—faint reflections indeed, yet real ones,—in human souls like our own, of the glories of the Sun.of righteousness. They show us that man can, like Christ, gladly lay down his life for the sake of God and his brethren. They show us that man can love, after the example of Christ, and in the way in which Christ loved. They show us the type among men of that perfect innocence and humility which was in Him. They show us, one by one, the chief parts which together make up in a human soul that likeness of Christ which He was born to re-create among us. If we want to be like Christ, we must be like St. Stephen, like St. John, like the Innocents, in those special graces for which we have them in remembrance.

There can be no true Christian character without that readiness to deny ourselves, that readiness to take anything disagreeable, anything dangerous, for the sake of doing our duty, which we see in St. Stephen. Self-denial, self-forgetfulness, was the foun-

dation on which his service rested; it was at the bottom of all the great things he did for Christ. He counted nothing, not even his life, dear to himself, so that he might do what his Master had given him to do. What Christ had given him to do was to rebuke the sin of the Jews, and to bear witness of Christ before those who hated Him. Stephen knew that he was rebuking the very people who had crucified his Master; but, for all that, he went on and was not afraid, whatever they might do to him. And so he was the first to follow Christ in His death. He died, as Christ had died, praying for his murderers. Here is the very beginning of Christian service. Without this readiness to deny ourselves we cannot be the servants of the crucified; we cannot in any way do as He did, or be like Him. "Whosoever will come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me." "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall find it." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Therefore, I say, is the example of St. Stephen shown us after Christmas Day that we may be reminded that to live as Christ lived, to be like Christ, we must begin with the readiness to deny ourselves, to die for Christ.

There can be no true Christian character without love,—that love of which St. John was the great teacher and example. To be a Christian, and yet to be without that which was the very life of Christ, His endless love, is a contradiction and an impossibility. Love is the life of souls. Without it they

are dead, and a dead soul has nothing to do with that which Christ was born on Christmas Day to do for us. So if you care about Christmas, if you care about Him who came among us in the flesh to make us His brethren, see whether you have love,—I do not say like His,—but anything after that human pattern which is shown us in the disciple whom Christ loved for his fulness of love. How much have you of the spirit of St. John? He it is who taught to the utmost his Master's love. He it is who has told us most of Christ's outpourings of love. He it is who has told us that Christ said, "This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another." He it is who has told us that Christ said, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." He it is who has left the blessed record, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He it is whose own words are so full, so burning with his Master's love. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Before we pass away from the thoughts of Christmas, St. John, the chief pattern in Christ's Church of Christian love, is set before us that we may be reminded how men ought to receive the love of God shown to them in Christ's birth; and how by God's grace they may—sinners as they are—be enabled to receive it.

And the day of the Innocents reminds us that, as there can be no Christian character without self-denial and without love, so there can be none without the lowliness and purity of which they were examples. "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." "This then is the message, which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." He that hath hope in Christ "purifieth himself, even as He is pure." There can be no mistake about this. Christ was pure and holy, and the impure, the sensual, the unholy, are none of His. Let a man's professions, his zeal, his confidence, be what they may, if he is a follower of the lusts of the flesh he can be none of Christ's. He can have no part in that new creation which began when Christ was born at Bethlehem. He who is not trying to be like the little children who suffered for Christ at Bethlehem, and like the children whom Christ took up in His arms, and set forth as examples to His disciples, is as yet no follower of Him who was born of a pure Virgin, and without spot of sin; and at His entrance into the world which He came to save was laid in the manger of the inn.

These then are the reasons why these three days follow Christmas Day; why these special examples are joined with the remembrance of Him who came to restore and save mankind. Together they show us what was all in one in Jesus Christ. They show

us what, if we are to be like Christ, must be all in one in us. St. Stephen, though he is the pattern of self-denial, had the love of St. John. St. John, because he had the copy of his Lord's love, was just as ready as St. Stephen to lay down his life for his brethren, if Christ had bidden him do so. Remember, it is not one grace alone that makes the Christian like Christ or His saints. We may have St. Stephen's zeal without St. John's love, and it avails us little. We may think that we have St. John's love because we are kind and tender-hearted, and ready to do a good turn to our brethren, or because we often have on our lips that great watchword of our religion, *love*; but if we are but talkers about love, if we use it only because it is a fine and beautiful word to use, if while we talk about love we are practically pleasers of ourselves—disobedient, unfaithful in our duties to others; if while we are kind and good-natured we indulge in fleshly lusts, and give way to impure and sinful thoughts,—we must not deceive ourselves,—it is no use thinking we have love like that of St. John. There is no love, no Christian love, without St. Stephen's self-denial and hatred of evil, and without the purity, the lowliness, the freedom from pride and self-conceit of the little children whom Herod slew for Christ.

Such as our Master was, such must His servants be; what He was born to be, they must grow to be. May He, of His mercy, make us more and more like Himself, that we may be fit to see His face in glory. May He "sanctify us wholly, that our whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

## V

## CHRIST'S NEVER-FAILING SYMPATHY

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage."—ST. JOHN ii. 1, 2.

THE miracles of our Lord were of different sorts. Some were to show His power; others were to show His goodness; others were a kind of type or sign of His office as the Redeemer and Saviour of souls. Others were, in like manner, a type or sign of His office as the Judge and Punisher of the impenitent. Most of them were miracles of mercy in some shape or other. A few were miracles to warn men and startle them; but almost all had a spiritual meaning and significance, over and above the wonderful display of tenderness, or wisdom, or heavenly justice in the miracle itself.

When He fed the five thousand with the few loaves and fishes in the desert place, besides the gracious act of love and care for the poor hungry wanderers, He gave a token of how He, all day long, prepares a table before His people in the wilderness, and feeds them with the bread of heaven; how He strengthens their heart with food which is more divine than man could provide, and supplies the wants of their souls when they are fainting and ready to perish.

When He healed the sick, and opened the eyes of the blind, and made the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk, and stanched the issue of blood, and cleansed the leper, and gave strength to the sick of the palsy, and drove out the devils, what are all these precious miracles but tokens of the way in which He deals with the diseases of the soul; making the drunkard sober, and the liar true, and the proud humble, driving out the devil of lust and uncleanness, of hatred and malice; teaching the careless to be watchful and earnest, the idle waster of his time to dedicate it to God's service, the lover of this world and of money to open his eyes and see the better things which God has to give.

When He walked on the water, and bade Peter come to Him, and held him up when he was sinking, what was it for but first to teach His disciples that He had good reason to tell them to put their faith in Him, and that without Him they could hope for no deliverance; and next, to teach us too that in the troubles and storms of life He is greater than the power of the storm, full of grace and love in the thick of trouble; that He is with us in it all; that with Him in company we may boldly venture to cast ourselves into it; but that also it is only too likely that we shall "begin to sink," and that there is only one arm in all the world which can hold us up, and that is His?

When He raised the dead, He showed us the image and type of that Almighty power, which can raise the soul, dead in trespasses and sins, to the life of righteousness. When, under His curse, the fig-tree withered away, He showed us what must become of those who promise and profess, but bring forth no

fruit; who honour Him with their lips but their heart is far from Him.

And so, in all His miracles, we may look for some likeness to things spiritual, some figure of spiritual goodness, some type of the supply of spiritual needs, some lesson of spiritual truth, which belongs to *us* as much as to those for whom the miracles were first done. They were done for our sakes, as truly as for the sick whom Christ healed, or the disciples whose faith He wished to strengthen, or the multitudes who looked on, and whom He tried to draw to Him.

What shall we learn of this miracle of turning the water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana? We must all feel it to be a very wonderful and a very beautiful miracle. Very wonderful as a display of power, creating with a word one thing from another so entirely different,—wine, that is made by the art of man, from simple water,—giving in a moment to the water the new properties and nature of wine; as wonderful as that other miracle, when at His word the five loaves grew and multiplied, no one saw how, into the abundant banquet of five thousand men, besides women and children.

Very beautiful too;—done so quietly, done so humbly and without display, caring for no thanks or honour from it; simply taking thought for the pleasure, and enjoyment, and merry-making of the company He was in, without letting them know how He had contributed to it. Very wonderful and very beautiful, I say; but what is it to us? What may we learn from it?

1. We learn from it, first, that Christ is willing to

be with us, not merely in places and times of religious service, but in all the times also of our pleasure and enjoyment, in our marriage feasts and days of rejoicing and happiness, and daily at our table, and meals, and fireside, when we talk freely, and open ourselves, and laugh and are merry with our friends; and that as He is willing to be with us there, and to bless our enjoyment, so we ought by faith to see Him there; to see Him by faith, not to make us gloomy, or restrain our mirth, but to make us thankful for our enjoyments, and to keep them innocent.

We are apt to think that nothing could be worthy of such a person as Jesus Christ was, nothing could be worth His thought, nothing worth His speaking or caring about, but what was plainly and visibly a matter of salvation. We fancy Him busy only with what we call important and serious things,—preaching, teaching, explaining the things of the kingdom of God; healing, rebuking, calling to repentance. We have a kind of feeling that anything lower than this would have been not high and heavenly enough for Him; that it would hardly have become Him, that it would have been a waste of His time. We can hardly fancy Him having anything to do with the round of every-day conversation, or enjoyment, which fills up our time, or taking any interest in it. In our thoughts we set Him apart from it all, only speaking of religion and God, only doing the things which we call religious, praying and exhorting, and trying to convert the sinners round Him. And, perhaps, while we think of Jesus Christ as entirely separate from all the common affairs and pleasures of this life, we draw the same line between

religion and our daily life for ourselves, and follow the business, and enjoy the pleasures which come in our daily life, without thinking that religion has anything whatever to do with them. While we cannot fancy Jesus Christ taking part with men in the eating, and drinking, and making merry, as if it was something too low for Him, we go on day after day eating and drinking, talking to one another and making merry, and thinking it the most natural thing in the world to do all this, without ever letting the remembrance of Jesus Christ into our minds; as if anywhere, but in church and at our prayers, the thought of Jesus Christ was too high and exalted to be joined with matters of common life. We think of Jesus Christ as being too much devoted to religion, too much belonging to heaven, to have anything in common with the ordinary work and pleasures of men; we take for *our* portion this ordinary work and pleasure, not caring that Christ should bless them, only afraid lest Christ should hinder and spoil them.

How unlike to all this is the history of the miracle at Cana. How unlike to what we fancy of Jesus Christ, and His keeping aloof from the common ways of men, and being busy only with what is directly and professedly religious, according to that notion of religion which makes church and Sunday the only place and time when we are bound to be religious. Jesus Christ came to the marriage at Cana, not to preach, not to talk about the great business He was in the world for, but merely to be there; to give pleasure to those who had invited Him, to show His kind feeling and interest in those by whom the feast

was prepared. He went no otherwise than as one of us might go to a friend's wedding, simply to give pleasure, to do honour, to be one of the guests. The feast went on, and the house was full of company, and people's hearts were full of the joyful occasion, and the guests talked and made merry; and with them, and as one of them, was the Saviour of the world, not checking their joy, not stopping them *then* to make them hear of more serious matters, but letting them go on, and take their fill of the happiness which God had sent them, without reproof or hindrance.

And more than this. He helped their gladness; He was not content with gracing and sanctioning the feast with His presence, He contributed to the feast Himself: more than this, He condescended to put forth His Divine power, as the Creator and Ruler of nature, to supply what had run short at this occasion, as we should call it, of mere earthly merry-making: He condescended even to take care that the wine, which He provided, should be better to their taste than what they had had of their own. And at the time He provided for their enjoyment without letting them know at whose hands they received it. He would do nothing openly. He stopped His mother, when she seemed to interfere; He would not be brought into public, as a worker of miracles. Only "the servants which drew the water knew" at the time whose gift the wine was. The ruler of the feast wondered at the good wine which was come to gladden the heart of the company; but Christ added no word to the benefit which He had done, and left the miracle to work its effect. After the feast was over, men

remembered the Holy Presence, and the gracious mark of divine blessing and favour, which they had seen or heard of.

And so Christ will be with us. He will be with us not only in church and in prayer; not only in times of trouble and visitation, when we need Him to help us, but in times of rejoicing and holiday, to make our joy greater and our holiday brighter. He is ready to be with us on those great days, which are the white days of our life, and which we keep in remembrance all our days after: a marriage, a christening, a first sight and visit in some new place, which fills us with wonder and gladness, a meeting with an old friend long out of sight, a pleasant company, a happy day of pleasuring, an unexpected piece of good fortune. Christ is willing to be with us in these familiar things, which make up the course of our day, and which to many are so full of happiness, and to few without much that they find enjoyment in: our morning and evening meal, our visit to a friend, our social talk with a neighbour about our common interests, the pleasure we receive from a walk, an interesting book, the sight of a beautiful country, the sound of music. He will be with us to bless our table, to sanctify our hearts and feelings in conversation, to warm our love to our friend, to give fresh delight to the beautiful view, or the sweet music, to throw a fresh charm over the pleasant talk, to give a new meaning to the interesting book.

In all these delights and employments of our common life He will be with us if we will "call Him," as He was called to the marriage at Cana. He does not despise them. He does not tell us to

give them up, as not belonging to the life of a Christian. He does not come to change their nature or diminish their enjoyment. He does not disturb, or frighten, or chill us in them. He will be there as He was at Cana, only to increase them.

But what we have to take care of is, lest we refuse to have Him. Our way is to think that it is enough to have Him at church; that we do not want Him, that He has no business, at the pleasuring, by the fireside, at the daily meal, in the friendly talk, or the marriage feast. And church takes up but a small part of our time, and these things, together with the works and cares of life, take up the rest; so that it is little indeed that we have Christ with us. He is not wanted when we are busy; and when we turn from our business to refresh and enjoy ourselves, He is not wanted either.

And yet He ought to be there. He must be there if we are to work, and to enjoy ourselves as Christians, and not as mere worldlings. He does not refuse to be with us: He does not think it beneath Him to join us. It is because *we* have no faith; because *we* do not believe or care about His love for us and His promises to us, if we say that it will spoil our pleasure, or hinder our business, to think of Him as being with us and blessing us.

See Him with you, by faith, and your conversation will not be less unrestrained nor your laugh less hearty, but with Him present you will shun all that is unholy, all that is wrong to say or to laugh at, all that is false, and proud, and ill-natured, and uncharitable. Remember that He is with you, and your rejoicing will not be merely a rejoicing of this

world, which is without thankfulness, and without kindness; which puts out of your head the thought of eternal things, and makes you indisposed and cold towards them, and, at last, goes out like a candle when it is burnt out, and leaves only sorrow and bitterness behind.

Set Him before your face, and He will show you how far to go in your free and familiar talk, and where to stop. He will make you feel and see the bounds within which your mirth and enjoyment ought to be kept, and will also make it all the more cheerful and hearty within those bounds. Set Him before your face, and be thankful for His making your life so easy, and conversation so pleasant to you, for the daily meal that He spreads before you, and for the feast at which, from time to time, He collects you and your friends; and your thankfulness will separate and sanctify your enjoyment from that feasting which forgets God and despises man, and your joy will come to you with the blessing of Him whose mercy is over all His works, and who has appointed a time for all things;—a time to laugh, as well as a time to weep; a time to dance, as well as a time to mourn; a time to rejoice over His gifts in this world, and to use them without abusing them, as well as a time to give them up and to do without them.

2. Nor is this miracle without its peculiar lesson of encouragement and comfort. It was a miracle of turning the weaker into the stronger, the common into the precious, the despised into the excellent, the tasteless into that which gladdens the heart of man. It was not merely the increase and multiplication of

something already made, like the feeding of the five thousand with the five loaves. It was taking so common and cheap a thing as water, and raising it to the higher uses and excellences of wine; changing and exalting it, and giving it new strength and new pleasantness. And is not this the type of the wonderful way in which Christ deals with the souls of those who put themselves into His hands? *He makes the water wine.*

A sinner turns in weakness and fear from his sins, hardly hoping that he can ever become fit for heaven; hardly hoping that his infirmity will ever be healed; hardly hoping that the will within him, which has so often yielded to temptation, can ever become strengthened to will what is good, and pure, and holy; but he goes on, humbly trusting in Christ's mercy and faithfulness and love, striving with pain against his old sins, and their after entanglement, but striving in faith; and in time, according to such an one's faith and earnestness, the old man begins to be destroyed and the new man to be formed in him. *The water is made wine.*

Or God puts on us some duty alone our strength. We seem as if we should be crushed to the ground by what God requires of us, by the confusion and misery which must come on us in doing what He has called us to. But, if the person so called goes on in Christ's strength, he finds in time that what once seemed hard, comes by degrees to be easier and lighter; he finds that he can do, by Christ's help, what he thought he never should do; his fear is turned into boldness, his hanging back into forwardness. *The water is made wine.*

Or some grievous dispensation visits him: one that he has long made up his mind he never could bear; some sickness, some separation, some downfall. It comes, and Christ strengthens him to bear it; it comes, and, with it, new experience of Christ's tenderness and love; it comes, and he finds it a visitation of comfort, and the secret communication of peace that he never knew before. It comes, and what threatened to be so terrible, opens to him the windows of heaven, and draws aside the veil from the mercy-seat of God. The earthly sorrow has been glorified with light and grace from heaven. *The water has been made wine.*

And Christ is ready to do this for all who will trust Him; to take them by surprise, as it were, as He did the guests at Cana, and make the water wine when they least expect it. Only let us attend to what was said then: "His mother saith to the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." He must not be pressed to work before His time. Only let us do whatever He saith unto us, and be sure that in His own way He will do the rest, in a more wonderful way than we could either have done or imagined it.

Call Him to be with you, in the house and by the way; when you are glad as well as when you are driven to remember Him by sorrow. And so shall you find Him ever ready to prepare a table for you, and to crown your cup with joy, till He brings you to that marriage supper of the Lamb, and calls you to eat bread in the kingdom of God.

## VI

## THE DANGER OF DELAY

"What must I do to be saved?"—ACTS xvi. 30.

THE man who first asked this question was an ignorant heathen, who had never heard of Jesus Christ, except, perhaps, to blaspheme Him, or mock at His name and gospel. It was, as you remember, the gaoler at Philippi, who was frightened when the earthquake shook the prison, where St. Paul had been shut up, and brought before this poor untaught man the terrors of his own sins and conscience, and the prospect of death and the wrath of God, without any means of saving himself. He knew no better. All he knew was, that sin is sure to be found out, and punished at last. But he rushed to his prisoners, St. Paul and Silas, and cried out to them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He knew nothing of the Gospel news which they brought. He only knew his own danger and sin, without being certain that they could deliver him from it.

Very different indeed are we: we, who have been baptized into Christ's Name, and been taken into covenant with Him, and have heard of Him all our lives. Very different are we, even those among us who know least. For the most ignorant and neglected

among us has had advantages and blessings, and opportunities of knowing, which the poor heathen gaoler never had. Those of us who know least, know more than he did; and might, but for their own fault, have known much more. Yet in a Christian land, and among those who know the name of Christ, it is still very necessary to ask the question which the heathen gaoler first asked.

The return of this season of Lent reminds us once more, as it has done so often before, how necessary it is to ask it. These solemn days of humiliation and repentance which began on Ash Wednesday call to us all to ask ourselves the question, "What must I do to be saved?" For the days of Lent are a call once more, from Almighty God to His people, to consider, each man for himself, what is going to become of him. They are the solemn declaring to the whole world of God's terrible and most certain judgment on all kinds of sin, and on sinners of every sort, high and low, if they still go on sinning, in spite of God's long-suffering and mercy. These days of Lent are the public warning forced upon us once more, that sin will be our ruin, if it is not put away and pardoned before we die; and that there is one way open, and *only one* way, for our escape from death and hell; the way of true repentance, and turning to God, with a steadfast, and true, and obedient faith in Jesus Christ. The evil of sin is set before us, on the one hand; its deceitfulness, its obstinacy, cleaving to our souls, like some dreadful and deadly disease, which it is difficult to cure; its manifold shapes and sorts; the way in which it keeps hold on, and surprises, even good men; its

hatefulness in God's sight; the certainty that, unless it is healed and taken away, it must bring our souls to ruin, just as a consumption or a fever, if not stopped, must kill our bodies. And, on the other hand, we have set before us all that God has done and spoken, to save us from this destruction. Over and over again we are warned to repent, we are promised that He will spare those who *do* repent; we are shown all the marvellous means which His grace has provided, to save us from our sins,—not only to pardon and wash them out, but also to cleanse us from their power, to change our sinful hearts and to make us new creatures; to strengthen us against the enemies of our salvation, and to help us to walk worthy of our calling as His servants and children.

These are the thoughts which are *forced* on us at this time. If we go to Church at all, we cannot help feeling that we are in the midst of a time of repentance, when a great deal is said about sin,—its certain dangers, and our own share in the sins of the world. We cannot put any of these thoughts from us, even if we harden ourselves against them, or make a mock of them. God is indeed calling us loudly to repentance, as the only way of escaping from the wrath to come; as loudly and as solemnly as John the Baptist called the Jews, when he went forth preaching in the wilderness, and showing them their sins.

"What must I do—what am I doing—to be saved?" that is the broad, simple, and most awful question which this season sets before us. In what road am I walking—where am I going to—where shall I end? with God, or with the devil?

There are many important questions to be attended to in this world, for all of us; many important businesses to be looked after, and to take up our time and thoughts. God does not forbid our thinking about them. He gives us plenty of time to employ ourselves about them. But after all said and done, there is one question, one simple question which is above all others; one important business, in comparison with which, if it is not attended to, all others are like chaff and smoke;—the salvation of our souls. The question is, Are we in the way to be saved, or in the way to be lost? That business God lays before us now: that question He calls on us to attend to, and answer, now: and in God's name, and by His authority, I put that question before each of your consciences, and require you, as you will answer for it before the Great Judge at the last day, to see what you can say to it. Are you trying to walk in the way of salvation? If not, where are you going to? And what is your hope against the threatenings and the power of God?

"What must I do to be saved?" It is a question for us all: a question which means that we have, all of us, need to look into our souls and consciences, and to see whether we are using this short life of ours on earth to any good purpose, or whether we are throwing it away, letting it slip, without any fruit; alas! even worse than that, whether we are laying up for ourselves at last a heavy load of condemnation and misery that never will end.

"What must I do to be saved?" It is not only a question for those who have not yet thought on religion at all,—for those who have yet to begin the

Christian life, the life of the new creature. It is a question also for those who have lived the longest as Christ's professed and earnest servants, for those who have begun, perhaps long ago, to repent and fight against their sins, and to try and please God in their daily life. It is a question even for those to whom faith in Jesus Christ is no new thing; who have already put their trust in Him, and are really walking according to their faith. Yes, my brethren, it is a question even for you who may have a comfortable hope that you have believed in Christ with your whole heart, and who remember Him in your ways. For sin is a subtle and deceitful thing, and sin will most surely deceive and entrap you, in spite of your earnestness, unless you are on the watch against it. You know what the condition of your warfare is. There is no standing still in it. There is no peace or compromise with your mortal enemy, your enemy who will hate you till your death, and, till the very last breath you draw, will try to tempt you away from God. There is no truce in that war. There is no standing still in that race. If you are not going forward in the way of God, you *must* be going backward. If you are not improving in the fruits of the Spirit, you must be worse than you were some time back; if you are not getting stronger you must be getting weaker; if you are not conquering your besetting sins, they are conquering you; if you are not pleasing God more and more, you are pleasing Him—oh! dreadful thought!—less and less. Is not this then a question even for you who have already begun to feel anxiety about your souls? Have not you, too, to ask, "What must I do, what

am I doing, to be saved?" None of us can trust to his beginnings, however good and promising. We must see from time to time where we are going, or we shall drift out of the right path, like a ship sailing without a pilot: however fair the wind may have been when we started, we shall fall among the rocks and quicksands, unless we look to see what course we are following.

And who knows more surely the terrible power of sin than he who has truly and earnestly tried to repent of it, to root it out of his heart, to fight against it? And shall any of us, however far we may be advanced in religion, turn a deaf ear to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" and think it no concern of ours when the forty days of Lent remind us both of the evil of sin generally, and of our own particular sins, and their guilt besides; and warn us to take care, lest while we are self-confident, and think ourselves safe, and in the right way, some secret sin may be entrapping us, and leading us unawares, to lose all our labour and hopes,—leading us, it may be, to destruction?

"What must I do to be saved?" It is a question for those to ask themselves who think that they shall be saved by leading a quiet, orderly, and respectable life in the eyes of men; by keeping out of gross and shameful sins; by bearing a good character in the world. *Will* such a life save us? That is the question; a question, indeed, of the deepest importance to many, because so many take it for granted that it will, and go on trusting to the chance that they are right. *Will* such a life save us? a respectable life, in which we do not actually go against God, but

merely forget Him, merely never think of Him? My brethren, if there be any here who are trusting in such a life, there is only one way in which you can find out about it, in which you can get an answer to be depended on. Look to the Bible—see what it says about your question. I read in the Bible that God, though the God of love, is a jealous God; that He requires us not only *not* to forget Him, but to love Him, and to love Him best; to love Him with all our hearts; that He will not have lip-service; that we cannot serve God and Mammon; that without holiness,—and holiness means a good deal more than being respectable and doing no harm,—no man can see the Lord; that God searches the hearts and reins; that He looks not on the outward appearance, as man does, but on the heart; that we may commit murder and adultery in our hearts, by angry and by unclean thoughts, though we outwardly do nothing that men can see or find fault with; and that at last God will bring not only our outward deeds, but every idle word and every secret thing into judgment; and that even the servant who hid his lord's talent will be cast out into outer darkness. I read that it is only by the grace of Jesus Christ that any one can be saved; only by repenting, and believing, and loving, and serving Jesus Christ that there is hope for any of us. That is what seems to me the answer which the Bible gives to the question, "Will a respectable character and a quiet life save a man?" Do you think that you can find a different one? No, my brethren, you do not, as soon as you come to think of it; but the thing is, you do your best not to think of it,—not to frighten and tease yourselves by asking

the question. You put away the thought, you try to escape the question by shutting your eyes to it, by burying your fears when they arise in the multitude of your earthly cares and business. For that very reason I call on you now,—now that the curse of God on unrepented sin is again solemnly proclaimed in our ears,—to ask that question. I beseech you, in the name of Christ, think, what are you doing to escape that wrath? how do you hope to avoid that curse?

The curse of sin made Jesus Christ fast forty days in the wilderness,—made Him suffer and die on the cross; and do you think that a good character, and not hurting any one, and doing as much of religious duty as will make men speak well of you,—and, for the rest, taking the world easy, and getting what good you can out of it,—that this is enough to save your souls, and bring you to be with Jesus Christ for ever?

But what are *you* going to do to be saved who have not even the miserable cloke and shelter of an outwardly fair and decent life to screen you from the wrath of God against sin? What are *you* going to do to be saved who openly break God's laws by gross and presumptuous sin? You, who sin with a high hand in the face of heaven,—you, to whom all the world, all who know you, bear witness week after week that you are sinners, even in the eyes of men? What are you going to do to be saved who have all your life long despised God's commandments, and rebelled against Him? Who have set your heart on sinning, in spite of His having sworn that He would punish you; and in spite of His having promised

that, if you would leave your sin and turn to Him, He would pardon and bless you? What are you going to do who are getting on in life, who are drawing near to the edge of the grave, with all your sins on your head, unforgiven, crying out for vengeance?

God has said, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." He has offered you His Holy Spirit to change and cleanse your hearts. He has said, "Turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." This is His way of salvation. But you would have none of it. You would not do what God bids you do, and offers to help you in doing, to be saved. Then, what *are* you going to do to be saved? "Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "On the ungodly He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest; this shall be their portion to drink." You do not choose God's way of mercy: what are you going to do to escape from His power and wrath? What do you mean to do to be saved? Day after day you add sin to sin. The devil, your tempter now, and your accuser afterwards at God's judgment seat, is marking them down, one by one,—every oath you swear, every lust that you give way to, every drunken riot that you fall into, every lie that you tell, every act of spite and revenge that you commit, every tale of slander that you carry, every theft, or dishonesty, or unfair dealing you are guilty of—all are marked

down against you; and at the end the devil is ready to meet you with the black list and number of your sins. What do you expect to do or say against him when, with that dreadful accusation, he claims you for his own; as one who did him service on earth, as one to whom *he* did service too, by giving you the pleasures for which you have sold yourself to him,—as one who was always his on earth, and whom, therefore, he may take for his servant in hell. What will you say against him? Will you plead against him then the precious blood of Christ? Alas! you despised it on earth. You were made a member of Christ once, but you broke away, and fell from Him: you crucified Christ by your sins, and trod Him under your feet. Will you cry to God for His mercy? Alas! when it was the time of grace you hardened yourself; "then shall it be too late to knock when the door shall be shut: and too late to cry for mercy when it is the time of justice."

Oh, my brethren, in that day, when the day of salvation is over, what will you do? unless you are stronger than the devil, to whom you have sold yourself, and who will then be able to have you in his power; or than God, whom you have forgotten, mocked, blasphemed, and rejected?

If there are any here who are going on doing what they know to be wrong, following unrepented sin, and who have never yet said to themselves, "What must I do to be saved?" let them ask themselves that question now. If they have put away the question from their minds, and shut their eyes to it, it is put before them now. Unless they stop their ears, they cannot help hearing it now. "What are you going to do to

be saved?" It is God's question, though He sends it by man's voice. It comes to them now; they must try to answer it, or despise it, and pass on. They are, as it were, come to where two roads divide. They must take one of them. This very day, this very hour, this very sermon, may be the turning-point of their lives for the time to come. God is calling them now. He is calling them to make up their minds whether they will choose Him, or take their chance of everlasting damnation. He is calling them to repentance now; it may be the last time. If they listen now, it may be the beginning of their salvation; if they turn away now, God may never again give them the opportunity, or the grace, to hear and understand the warning He has sent us, to flee from the wrath to come. Their hardening in sin, their final impenitence, their ruin at last, may depend on to-day and its issues. To-day the way of salvation is open to them; to-morrow it may be shut for ever, as it was to Judas, and to Pharaoh, even though they were not at once cut off.

What will you do to be saved? One thing I pray you, do not say in your heart, "I will wait till I am sick, and near my end; and then the clergyman will come to me, and read to me, and say some prayers, and I shall hear about the mercy of God, and I shall trust in that mercy." This is what many do say, if not openly, yet in their hearts. They live as long as they can in sin and disobedience, impenitent and unconverted, and comfort themselves that somehow or other it will be well with them at the last.

It is quite true that it is never too late for true

repentance—*true* repentance, mind—not *any* repentance, but repentance to which God gives grace to be true. But a *late* repentance is very seldom a *true* repentance, in those who have had warning of the danger of leaving repentance to the last. Such persons know that they ought to repent sooner; they have known it all along; they have made it a reason for sinning without fear that they should be able to make up at the last moment. Now to such persons the Gospel has a plain word; "To him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

May God give us all grace to return into our own hearts. May His great and heavy judgments awaken us from our dream of safety and selfish ease, to see how we are getting ready for that judgment seat to which so many are called with short warning. "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Merciful Lord, give us grace to prepare, while there is yet time, to be called before Thy face.

## VII

## THE COMFORT OF REPENTANCE

"For while I held my tongue: my bones consumed away through my daily complaining. For Thy hand is heavy upon me day and night: and my moisture is like the drought in summer."—PSALM xxxii. 3, 4.

WE all of us know that repentance of our sins is necessary for us if we hope to be saved in the next world. We all of us know how much true repentance does for us in preparing us to receive the mercy and blessing of God. True repentance is the path, the only path, of forgiveness, of restoration to God's favour, of becoming good and holy. And therefore, in the solemn words in which God's pardon is declared to "all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel," we are exhorted to "beseech Him to grant us true repentance, and His Holy Spirit, that those things may please Him which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy; so that at the last we may come to His eternal joy." But I am not going at present to speak of the benefit of repentance; nor of the necessity of it to all who have sinned and done wrong, if they would hope to shake off the burden of their sins. I wish to speak of another way of looking at it.

I wish to say a few words about the *comfort* of repentance.

By repentance I mean breaking off with our sins altogether. I do not mean merely being sorry for them. I do not mean merely looking them fairly in the face, fairly giving way to our conscience, and admitting the truth when our conscience tries to convince us that we have done wrong. I do not mean merely the honest, manly, owning against ourselves that "we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and have left undone those things which we ought to have done." All this is very necessary, very important; without it there can be no true repentance. But it is short of repentance.

Confession and acknowledgment of sin is part of repentance; it is the beginning and foundation of repentance; but it is the beginning, and not the whole. Sorrow and self-reproach, the broken and humbled heart, is part of repentance; but by itself it is not repentance. It may stop short of repentance. There is no true and real repentance until, after seeing our sins, after acknowledging our sins, after lamenting and being sorry about them, after being ashamed of them, after asking mercy for them, we break off from what we know to be wrong and sinful. Then, at last, is repentance fulfilled in earnest. Then, at last, we can begin to speak no longer merely of pain of conscience, of confession, of regret and self-accusation, but of what is in truth repentance.

Now, besides all the other good things that there are in repentance, there is great and solid *comfort*. There is comfort in much that is short of true

repentance. There is a kind of comfort, not a very real and trustworthy one, but for the time a kind of shadow of comfort when we feel sorry for our misdoings. There is very likely pain and bitterness of heart. According as our souls are awakened to the truth, according as our hearts are quick to feel, according as our consciences are tender and honest, there may be very deep and sharp pain, yet there will be a comfort even in feeling this pain. There will be the comfort that there always is in seeing the truth, in feeling ourselves awake out of deceit and falsehood, in knowing that we are alive to what we ought to be alive to. But it is a comfort which, *if it is all*, will not stay long with us, will not profit us much.

There is a better and more true comfort in being able, fairly and honestly, to own and confess our sins. It is a comfort spoken of in the thirty-second Psalm. As long as the Psalmist tried to hide from himself that he was doing wrong, he was miserable. As long as he tried to shelter himself under vain excuses, which his conscience told him were false and hollow,—as long as he was too proud and too much ashamed to own his sin, there was a load and a grief on his heart. "For while I held my tongue, my bones consumed away through my daily complaining. For Thy hand is heavy upon me day and night, and my moisture is like the drought in summer." Then he resolved to be bold and honest to his own sin: "I will acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid. I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord." And then came comfort,—the comfort of the sense of

being at peace with the Father who forgives the sins of His children when they own their sin,—"And so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin:"—the comfort of feeling that there was no longer a war between him and the mercy and righteousness of God; that, having confessed all, he had nothing more to hide, nothing more to make him ashamed. He could venture to think of God's nearness and God's power: "For this shall every one that is godly make his prayer unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found; but in the great water-floods they shall not come nigh him." Then did comfort come to the sinner, who, without flinching and making excuses, dared to look his sins in the face; gave up hiding them, and laid them before the eyes of God and the light of his own conscience.

But this comfort is not to be depended upon, and will not last unless something more follows. It is a strange thing, yet it is a very certain one, that people can confess and acknowledge their wrong-doings, and yet make no real attempt to put an end to them and change them. There is, as I said, a comfort when we have done wrong in manfully owning that we did wrong. But it is possible to rest on that comfort, to stay in it, and get no farther. And then, whatever comfort our acknowledgment of our sins may have given us either goes away or turns into a very dangerous delusion and self-deceit.—This is not yet what I mean by the comfort of repentance.

When we do wrong there are two ways in which our sins are made bitter and troublesome to us. Either we go on doing wrong, knowing that it is wrong, with our conscience ever convicting, reproach-

ing, condemning, burdening us; and that is a very wretched, miserable way to live. Or else there is a struggle between what is good and what is bad in us; a daily wrestling within our souls, between our wish to obey and please God, and our wish to do something which He will not give us leave to do; a battle, sometimes swinging to one side, sometimes to the other, between the powers of grace and righteousness and the powers of death and evil. And in the struggle our heart is, perhaps, torn to pieces. We cannot make up our minds which service we will take. Now we resolve to follow what is right; then comes something which tempts us grievously, and we cannot resist it, and we give up our resolutions and go after what is wrong. To-day the good influence seems to have gained the victory; we feel how pleasant, how easy, how good it is, to choose the right way and to walk in it. To-morrow all may be changed. Temptation meets us; the pleasure of some forbidden thing seems beyond our power to resist. We give way, and find ourselves clean opposite to what we were yesterday,—clean opposite in our feelings and hearts; liking what we hated, hating what then we liked, following what then we shrank from, turning away from what then seemed so true and beautiful and good.

Is not this a miserable state? Is it not miserable, if we are living boldly and openly in sin and wrong, to have our conscience continually telling us in our secret hearts that we *are* wrong, that we *know* we are wrong? Is it not miserable to have this conscience, which we cannot get rid of, cannot help hearing when it speaks, which we cannot put down

by a rude and scornful answer? Is it not miserable to have our own heart telling us that *it* judges us, that *it* condemns us?

Or, again, is it not miserable not to be able to make up our minds between what is right and what is sinful? Is it not miserable to be tossed about from one to the other; to be torn to pieces within our souls by going first after one and then after the other; by not being able to give ourselves to either heartily and perfectly; by having one part of our life always coming in to disturb and quarrel with the other? Is not this wretchedness?

And yet, unless a man has utterly sold himself to evil, unless a man's conscience is dead and perfectly destroyed within him, one of these two must be the state of every one who knowingly and willingly follows what is wrong. Either he does wrong with his conscience always accusing and vexing him; or he is divided between right and wrong, sometimes follows one side and sometimes the other, and is torn in pieces by the vain attempt to serve two masters, and join together things which the eternal laws of God will not allow to be joined together in peace.

Seeing, feeling, owning, confessing all this will not of itself mend or relieve it. There is only one way,—breaking off for good what is wrong. And this is repentance. Repentance is, *after* we have seen and felt and confessed and bewailed our misdeeds and wrong-doings, really breaking off from them, really giving them up. And this will not only bring us safety, forgiveness, the favour of God, the hope of everlasting rest; it will bring us, besides this, comfort.

Because it will set us at peace with ourselves; it will put an end to that fierce strife and storm within us by driving out for good one of the two powers which are fighting to gain our soul. Let us only choose one side. Let us only make up our mind what to follow, and half the trouble and difficulty of what we have to do is at once cut off. Our path may be rugged, but it is plain, straightforward, simple. We know that our steps are in the right direction. We do not lose ground by trying to go two ways, and by going first one way and then the opposite. The work may be hard and trying, but our heart within us is one with us; our conscience is on our side to cheer us in our work. So is it when we have once made our choice by true repentance. There will be a wrench perhaps. We may have to give up what we can hardly part with. We may have to tear ourselves away with pain and tears. We may have to make a heavy sacrifice. This is what Christ means when He talks of cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye to save the soul. But when once the resolution is taken, when once the wrong thing, the evil temptation is finally given up and parted from for ever, then comes peace,—then comes the feeling, which swallows up all others, of having done the right thing. And then, at last, our life moves on with that perpetual and unfailing comfort which nothing can take away, of having, for good, separated ourselves from what we knew to be bad and forbidden,—of having given up for ever what we knew to be the wrong path,—of having finally broken off with the things which disturbed us even while they tempted

us, and which, however sweet they might be in the first taste, turned bitter in the mouth afterwards.

This is repentance, and this is the comfort which repentance brings with it. With its trials, with its sacrifices, with its self-denials (and repentance has all this), let us not forget that it has also comfort which outweighs them all—the comfort of being at peace not only with God but with our own hearts.

We can bear much when we are at peace within. That which makes trouble so dreadful, so hard to endure, is our own secret knowledge that we are unfaithful to our duty, unfaithful to Christ and our Father. That which gives the sting to our difficulties is the conscience which tells us of our own sin; which tells us that we have not yet made our honest choice between what is right and what is wrong; which tells us that, while we are trying to think ourselves followers of what is good, we are, underhand, trying to see if we cannot have dealings with sin.

But let us break the yoke. Let us not only be sorry for what we have done wrong, but honestly seek the grace and help of God to have done with it for ever. Let us turn our backs on it, not looking behind, but with undivided heart giving it up for ever. The wrench, painful as it may be, will soon be forgotten. The sacrifice, whatever it may be, will soon be made up for an hundredfold. But the rest, the consolation, the peace which will come at the very first, will go on increasing for ever to the end. Daily we shall find our path more clear. Daily we shall find how many troubles, how many difficulties, we have saved ourselves by having taken

our side, by having for good separated ourselves from what is wrong.

The beginning of repentance may be with clouds and storms, with perplexity and distress and anguish of heart. But let it be repentance in earnest,—the earnest and honest breaking off from what is evil and sinful; and the clouds will soon give way to calm and sunshine, and it will be to us the path leading us through peace and contentment, and the rest of a good conscience here, to the rest of glory, without regret and without stain, in God's kingdom in heaven.

## VIII

## STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—ST. MATTHEW v. 48.

"PERFECT," of course, does not mean anything impossible or inconceivable, as that man should, even if a saint, be without sin and faultiness, or that he should really be absolutely like his Father in heaven. Our Lord spoke to reasonable men, and did not expect His words to be understood unreasonably. By "perfect" He meant something which men might be if they would,—something which, by the help of God's grace, they might become, without ceasing to be men, before they die. He meant that they should not be willingly, and by their own fault, less good than they might be. He meant that they should not willingly, and by their own fault, stop short of what they saw to be right, and saw that they ought to try to become. He meant that, as God is not good at some times and not at others,—as He is always good,—so men should feel it their duty to try always to be like their Father in heaven. He meant that men should not pick and choose among God's commandments; that they should not keep them as much as they liked, and no further; that they should not think they had done their duty by an outward

observance of the letter, without any care for observing them in their own hearts, and according to their spirit and meaning. He meant, not that every Christian was to do everything that was spoken of as good and holy in the Bible, or that other Christians might be called to, but that, in doing his duty, every Christian was to feel that he was bound to do his best in his own calling.

It must strike us, when we read the New Testament, that for men to do their best *then* meant something very different from what we believe ourselves called to now. There is nothing wonderful in this. Differences of times and circumstances make differences of duties. We live in quiet times; but suppose we lived in rough and troubled times, plainly our worldly duties, the things we should all be called upon to do, would be very different. In war, or if a country is filled with enemies, it is plain that people must feel called on for many things for which they are not called on in peace; they must make up their minds to trials, hardships, sacrifices,—as a matter of course, which they would not think of under other circumstances. So it is plain that in the days of the New Testament men were called to do their best in a different way from what they are now.

There was a time when it was said, "If thou wilt be perfect"—that is, if thou wilt do thy best—"sell all, and give to the poor, and take up thy cross, and come and follow Me." When this was but what the Master did, what wonder if the disciples were called to do the same. There was a time when it was said, "Take no thought for your life, or for your

raiment:" "for after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." "Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." There was a time when for a man to pull down his barns and build greater was mere laying up treasure on the earth, for which he received the reproof of his Lord and Judge: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." There was a time when it was said, "Unless a man hate father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and children, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

There was a time when Christians had to take, for their regular, natural lot, trouble, persecution, abuse, hatred, sorrow and suffering of every kind; when their blessing was mourning, and their promise was tribulation; when their great Apostle could describe their condition in these words, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

The call everywhere was, to deny themselves; their continual lesson and example, the cross of Christ; their unceasing warning against the world, against riches, against being full, and rejoicing now. To do their best then, to accomplish the conversion of the world, Christians had, as a regular thing, to take up the lot and live the life of missionaries or of soldiers; a life of hardship and danger; a life which gave up the ordinary works and thoughts of this world; a life in which everything of the dearest and the most natural had to be utterly sacrificed and surrendered to the great call of duty; a life with

violent and painful death waiting at every step, and sure to come at last.

So had Christ used life to work out the salvation of the world. Those who were with Christ, and followed Him, were called to the same thing: "the disciple is not above his Master." The Gospel began in the hardest self-denial and suffering; and its first words and first days answered to this beginning.

This is what we most certainly find when we read the New Testament; and it is equally certain that it is a very different state of things from anything we have ever known. Our call, our trial, comes in a different shape. We are still called to deny ourselves, but it is not by leaving all. We are still called to take up and bear the cross, but it is not by persecution and the martyr's death. God still chastises those whom He loves, but not by appointing to them a life like St. Paul's.

We believe that God's providence, which has ordered the course of the world, has given us peace, and means us to labour and be industrious, and gives us, with His blessing, the fruits of our labour. He makes us households, and bids us rejoice in them; He bids us use the world, and yet not abuse it; He keeps far from us His scourges and great plagues; He calls upon us, and gives us the opportunity to "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." This is our condition. Our trial is not in war, but in peace. Trials we may be sure we have; the trial goes on in our inmost hearts just as truly, and, if we only knew it, just as sharply, as it did when men were called to leave all for Christ. But it certainly is not the same thing to be tried by

being called to leave all, and to be tried by having to serve God faithfully, to keep ourselves pure, to be unselfish, true-hearted, unworldly, in our quiet pleasant home. We need not be afraid that God leaves us without trials,—severe, searching, refining trials,—in spite of all the changes which have come upon the world, and the altered life and discipline which Christians have now to go through.

It is true that times are changed. But for this very reason that times are so changed and so softened to us, there is the more need for marking our Lord's words, and thinking what they meant, what they still mean. They may have become, in a literal sense, inapplicable. But they were the words of life and truth, meant for all ages; and for all ages they must have their eternal lesson. And if they sound stern and hard and severe, the more reason is it that we should remember that they were once *really spoken* and *really obeyed*; and that we should see in them a warning against the dangers our own easier life is likely to run into.

"Take no thought for the morrow" meant something different to those to whom it was first said from what it means to us, whose business it is to work for our livelihood, and to provide for our own. But surely to us it preaches as solemn and earnest a lesson as it did at first. For if it is our duty to work, it is our danger lest our hearts should be entangled in our work; if it is our duty to look forward, it is our danger to trust our own right hand, or wealth, and to forget that we are every moment in the hands of God. If it is our duty to use the means and talents His Providence gives us, it is our danger

to forget the Giver in the gifts,—the end in the means,—the real power behind, in the outward instruments, the bread, the raiment, the money, by which God supports us. If it is our duty to work hard, as if all depended on ourselves, it is our danger to forget that all depends still more on God. If it is our duty to value what He gives, it is our danger to give our whole heart to it, to care and be anxious only for what this world is to give us; to sink into the love of gain, the bands of a worldly mind, the blind worship of mammon.

With such dangers in our hearts, is it not well that we should remember who has said, even if He has not put it upon us in its literal sternness, "Take no thought for the morrow"? Has it not all the more force for us because our way of life is one which necessarily has to take thought for the morrow?—in which we should be neglecting our plainest duties if we did not take thought for the morrow? Yet is it not always and equally true that the morrow is not in our power? that the work and the labour are ours, but only with Him is the accomplishment and the reward? All our thinking and care cannot do anything, unless He, whom we are so ready to forget and set aside, is pleased to grant His blessing.

To the Christian of eighteen hundred years ago, who left all to follow Christ, and to the Christian of to-day, who believes that he fulfils God's will by industry, saving, and forethought,—to both equally the morrow is not theirs; the morrow belongs to God. Both have to do their duties, though the duties are so different; both are equally told by their Master to

leave what shall come of their duty to-morrow to Him to whom alone to-morrow belongs. Do your work, whatever it is, to-day ; then remember that it is really in God's hands, and leave it in His hands. To-morrow will come to you, if it is His will ; and with to-morrow, to-morrow's rewards, to-morrow's blessings, if you deserve it. If not, all you can do will not ensure to-morrow. Do not set your heart on it as if it was yours, to make your own.

"Take no thought for the morrow" means now as it meant then, *Trust God first, and wholly, and honestly.* And that is a lesson as needful for one time as for another.

And so with other of our Lord's sayings, which at first seem only to belong to the first days. Their meaning to us may not be in what they directly say; but we shall find it, if we consider the reason why they were said, and what it is which is implied in them. In what our Lord says of riches, He *does* mean to say that riches are a real and dangerous trial. In what He says of turning one cheek to him who has smitten the other, He *does* mean to insist on the royal greatness of humility, and giving way, and bearing injustice ; it was the greatness which He showed Himself. In what He says of the blessedness of suffering and mourning, He *does* mean that men are not always happiest when they have what they like, nor always most to be pitied when they are cut off from what is pleasant to flesh and blood,—when their lot is sickness, and narrow means, and earthly disappointment.

But, anyhow, now as formerly, the command of our Master holds, "Be ye perfect." Do your best.

Do not let yours be an irregular, up-and-down, half-and-half attempt to do God's will, to live according to your conscience and light. Do not use two measures, and false weights in what you do as your religious service. Do your best; do it with a whole heart; let all be thorough.

And surely now, if ever, this appeal ought to come home to us. For now God of His mercy has spared us the trials of early times. Now for the storms of those days God has given us peace. Instead of the absolute privation and forsaking of all earthly things, He lets us enjoy our homes in quiet; instead of persecution, He protects and keeps us safe; instead of the real, literal cross of shame and blood, forced upon us whether we will or no, He trusts our trial, our self-denial, our self-discipline to our own judgment, our own honesty. He has taken off from us the heavy load of outward suffering, which to the end of things men will always shrink from, even though it may not really be so heavy as many inward trials. But so it is. He has lightened what we feel to be a very heavy part of the trial which others have had to go through.

How much more reason for doing our part as we ought! How much more reason for doing our best, when it is made so much less hard and painful to do it! Shall we make it a reason for failing in small trials, that God has saved us from great ones? Shall we not rather desire to prove that our honesty, our thankfulness, will *bear* being put to a less severe trial; that we are not unmindful of the difference which God has made, in giving us times of peace and gentle quiet; that, even without the fiery

trial, the forsaking all, the homeless life, the perpetual poverty, the martyr's death, men may yet hear, and answer to the Lord's call to be perfect,—may yet be in earnest in trying to do their best.

## IX

## THE MIND OF JESUS CHRIST

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."—PHILIPPIANS ii. 5.

ST. PAUL tells us that we ought to have the mind of Jesus Christ. We ought to try to have that mind—to think as He did, to have something of His Spirit and feeling—at all times. But especially when we are going to have before our minds His Cross and Passion—that in which His "mind" showed itself in so wonderful a way, we should wish to understand and share that mind. We cannot believe in the Cross, we cannot understand it, without having something of the Spirit which led to the Cross. Let us think what was the "mind which was in Christ Jesus."

The mind of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul speaks of it here, was His Infinite Compassion and His Infinite Humility.

Men were very miserable, and He took pity on them, and came here to give them comfort and hope. We do not want the Bible to tell us that, without the light and hope which He has brought us, man's condition, as a whole, is strangely miserable. Even with what the Bible tells us about how

it began, we can understand but little of the reasons why it is so. But we want no one to tell us the fact that sin is in the world; that sin brings on men unhappiness and ruin in every shape. We want no one to tell us, we know it too well ourselves, what sickness is, and pain, and weakness. We want no one to tell us what it is to have great hopes, and see them fail; to put our confidence in what seems immovable and strong, and see what we trusted in break up and sink, like a wrecked ship. And though we have our turns of light and darkness, of joy and sorrow, and though there is indeed so much happiness in the world, and endless reasons to be thankful for all that we enjoy so bountifully, yet, after all, and at last, there comes one thing that there is no getting rid of,—that gives the measure of our condition here; that turns the scale against every man in the end. The end of a man's life may be with all kinds of prosperity, but the end is, he must die. The closing scene is not, as in a book or a story, one of success and satisfaction; in real life it is of mourning, of separation, and death. That is a man's condition; and to make it worse, he tears himself and other men, and scourges them, and makes them still more miserable, by his sins—by his selfishness, his cruelty, his greediness, his wrong-dealing.

This was what Jesus Christ saw among men: the natural condition of the world; its condition as men knew it by experience—a condition which, *without* the hope and salvation brought by Christ, is indeed dark and dreadful. Truly does the Apostle say, "There is none other name under heaven

given among men, whereby we must be saved." For if not by Jesus Christ, then there is no hope, no conceivable ray of light to be seen anywhere. His name does indeed clear up the darkness. His name does open to us hopes and promises beyond all thought. But take away that name, and there is nothing left.

But He looked down on us, and had compassion on us. He beheld us in all our sorrows and sins, and He loved us. He, Perfect in Holiness, in Happiness, in Glory,—He beheld our suffering and struggling life, with its sparks of good and clouds of evil, and His heart yearned to us in our misery and low estate. And He would be Himself our Deliverer. There was a sacrifice to be made; there was a great price to be paid; there was great pain to be suffered. But the sorrows and evils of the world filled His thoughts, and over against them He set His infinite compassion.

This was one thing in "the mind which was also in Christ Jesus": His Infinite Compassion. But there was also something more: His Infinite Humility.

When we think of His Humility, we think at once of His coming among us at all. He, the everlasting God, coming from heaven to narrow Himself to the conditions of a creature; to give up what He was with the Father, that He might live with men. This is by itself a descent which we cannot measure, for human thoughts cannot tell the height and greatness of that majesty from which He came down, or compare His Glory which He gave up with the nature of even a sinless creature, which He took on Him. And this is not all. He might

have come and lived with us as our Brother, or He might have come and ruled over us as our King. But He came, and was born among us, only to be poor and to suffer; He came not to rule, but to minister to us; He came, and died, He humbled Himself even to the death on the Cross. Yet, even so, we have not reached the point of His great humility.

Think what it was He came for. He came because of the sins of men; because the sins of men had made life hopeless, and without remedy; He came to cure the evils and miseries which men's folly and wrong-doing had brought about. He came to heal the diseases of the soul; to point out, to take away sin,—to reclaim men from their bad ways. It was because sinners had provoked God's righteousness, and brought such danger on the world, that, in His infinite compassion and love, He came to bring the great remedy.

And how did His creatures receive Him? "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." It is of this great refusal and rejection that we are going to read.[1] He deigned to come, and in His own person, *ask* men to be reconciled,—*ask* men to receive His blessing,—*ask* men to return to their Father,—*ask* men to respond to His infinite compassion;—and they turned their backs on Him. He deigned to stand before the men whose misery had kindled His infinite pity, and to stand before them misjudged, as a criminal. He being what He was, deigned to

[1] During Holy Week.

stand before the public opinion of the Jewish nation, and to be set down by it as a deceiver and false prophet. He, the Judge of all men, the Sinless and the True, submitted to stand before the judgment-seat of fools and hypocrites to have sentence passed on His claims by blind and wicked judges, to be charged with blasphemy by His own High Priests. He would take the fate of merely any just man, unjustly accused.

We can partly measure what such humiliation means. We know what it is to humble ourselves before those who, we think, have wronged us. We know what it is to go and ask people to be friends, who, we think, ought to have themselves come and asked to be forgiven. We know what it is, being innocent, to be charged with guilt; we know what it is, being innocent, to stand and have our case judged by those who dislike us,—by those for whom we have no respect,—by those who are incapable of giving an opinion about it. Yet the course of His work and ministry of self-sacrifice brought our Lord to this, to this deep bitter humiliation; and to this, in His infinite humility, He submitted. "Consider Him," says St. Paul, "that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself,"—the sinners whose needs and danger touched His heart so deeply, and brought Him down from heaven among them. "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." Being the Lord and Maker of all things, He stood before Caiaphas, and was condemned as a blasphemer.

This was the mind of Jesus Christ, with which He wrought out that Sacrifice by which our sins have been taken away; by which the hope of a life that shall never end, and of which the prospects are boundless, has been opened, amid the perplexities, the sorrows, the disappointments of this mortal life. The Sacrifice began when in the secret of His Divine Will He chose to give Himself for man's redemption. It began on earth, when He came to share our nature, and was born one of us, to inherit our lot. It went on during all His life, when He was tempted like as we are; when all day long He offered up His will and Himself that He might minister to men, and show them what it was to be perfectly good and true and loving. And at last it came to its end, in the last Supper, in the Agony in the garden, in the Betrayal, in the mockery of the judgment hall, in the precious Blood shed on the Cross. Then at last, when it came to the time to die, "He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."

Then was the Sacrifice completed; for there was nothing more left, even to Him, by which to show what He was willing to undergo to reconcile man to God. After that there was nothing more left but that He who had sunk so low should rise to the height of His victory. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This is what He has won for man. This is what man is meant for. But it is by His steps that we must go forward to His glory. It is by His mind that we must follow His victory. Consider, then, now when your hearts can hardly help being touched by what this week is full of, consider the mind that was in your Master. Consider His infinite compassion and pity. Consider His infinite humility. Consider how He looked on the world, and saw the troubles and miseries and sins that we know so well; how He looked on it, and heard the cry of the poor, the simple, and the needy,—the publicans and sinners whom no one cared for; and how His heart was, as it were, on fire within, and at last the fire kindled. "Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy will." And yet, to do that will, and to exercise that mercy, and to help those miserable sufferers, He had to come down and be one of them: "a body hast Thou prepared Me." "He by whom all things were made, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was made man. . . . He was crucified: He suffered, and was buried."

Let us try to pray, when we read and hear of that Cross and Passion, that "that mind may be in us which was also in Christ Jesus." That we may have compassion one with another; that we may be above no offices of love and kindness; that we may be ready to forgive, and, if need be (what is much more difficult), to be forgiven; that we may set face to face with our high thoughts of ourselves, Him "who, being in the form of God," "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a

servant"; who suffered the provocation of those for whom He had given up everything,—endured to stand innocent, before the judgment of the unjust and wicked,—refused not, for our sakes, not only to suffer and die, but to be "reckoned among the transgressors."

## X

## THE LESSON OF THE CROSS

"This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."—ST. JOHN xv. 12, 13, 14.

AT length the week is come almost to its end, and the warnings which Christ has given day by day of what was going to happen, have been fulfilled; and we are met here to bear witness, and to keep in our own remembrance, that on such a day as this Christ our Lord was indeed taken, and by wicked hands was crucified and slain. And very suddenly it seemed to come, notwithstanding those warnings. It came after the fashion of most of Christ's dealings; it came, not without preparation and notice; but it came suddenly at last. It had been foretold in the Prophets. He had often spoken of it Himself to His disciples. When the time drew near His words became very solemn and very clear about it. From the time that He had come to Jerusalem scarcely a day had passed without something happening to force the thought of it on His disciples' minds. From the supper at Bethany, where He had been anointed for His burial, to the Paschal supper, in which He had given to the disciples the sacrament

of His Body which was to be broken, and His Blood which was to be shed for them, all His words and actions pointed to death: a death which would not be long in coming, and would be very terrible when it did come. The disciples felt it; felt that they were walking about with one who was marked for death, who had of His own accord taken death as His portion. This was ample notice. Yet when it did come, it came upon the disciples unexpectedly. It came suddenly, and in an instant, like a fierce storm which bursts in a moment where just before there had been calm and quiet. On the Thursday evening He was in the midst of His disciples, speaking with them His words of consolation and promise, and free as yet from the malice of His enemies. Later on in the Thursday night He was taken; early on the Friday morning He was before Caiaphas, beginning His trial of cruel mockings and scourgings. A little later He was before Pilate, sentenced to death; and then in the hall, in the midst of the heathen soldiers, wearing the purple robe and the crown of thorns. At nine o'clock, the third hour of the day, He was already hanging on the Cross; at three o'clock He was dead. So sudden and speedy was it all: not to Him, but to those who were with Him. A few hours before He had been calmly supping with them; and the next thing was, to see Him who had washed their feet, naked and dying in the hands of the scorners. There was no time to collect their thoughts; no time gradually to get accustomed to the great change, as there is when death comes slowly and step by step on our friends, and we can recover from the first stunning shock

that it really *is* death coming. They had no time for this in the short hours from Thursday evening to the early morning of Friday. They ought, indeed, to have been ready for it before; they ought to have been prepared after all He had said to them. But they had not yet learnt Christ's lesson about being ever ready. Though they knew He was to die, they did not imagine that it would be at that very moment. So He took them by surprise (as He takes all who will not prepare at once when He gives them warning), by the suddenness and speed with which He passed from among them, through the agony of His Passion, to the grave.

And now the great day of the remembrance of it is come back to us again. We have been a long time, outwardly at least, preparing for it. We have been warned to keep it before our minds. We have heard it spoken of beforehand. We have known by the divisions of the year and the course of the Sundays that we should soon have to think of it—that the day was coming when it ought to fill and take up all our hearts. And now it is come. Are we fit for it? Are we in a state of mind fitly and with profit to read and follow and set before our thoughts the love wherewith our Master loved us? Or has it come upon us by surprise, as His death came on His disciples? It came to them in reality as the ruin of their hope and comfort, and filled them with dumb and hopeless sorrow, with selfish cowardice and forgetfulness of all their Master's love, and all His assurances. It comes to us in remembrance; and do we feel our hearts and souls in tune for it? Are we able and ready to devote our

thoughts to it, with the seriousness due to such recollections? Or do we feel that in reality we cannot get ourselves to care much for it; that we shall be glad when the day is over, which seems to make it a duty to try and think about what has no interest or meaning for us; that the recollection of the history of this day does not really make us feel more sorry for our sins, and more inclined to love God, and to please Him by our obedience?

There is one test by which we may try ourselves, whether we have sought to prepare our hearts to contemplate and dwell upon the marvellous love of our Saviour, which this day is meant to remind us of. Our feelings are not always under our command, and they are not always to be depended on. Many a faithful soul is, perhaps, this day mourning, and almost hopeless, because it feels itself dull and unmoved before the spectacle of the Cross of Christ. Jesus Christ seems to open His arms to it, to show it His wounds, to appeal to its devotion and love; and that love seems cold, its heart will not move towards its Saviour, will not give any response to His tender call. And, on the other hand, there are others who think that they are paying due honour to their crucified Master, and are making a fit and affectionate remembrance of His Passion, because their hearts burn within them, and they seem to be pierced through with quick and lively sympathy for all the love and all the suffering of that great sacrifice: who seem to see it all, as if they were actually present, and to feel all, as *they* did who followed Jesus, and stood afar off, gazing on His Cross. And yet these same persons, though their feelings are so

strong and keen, forget them when they pass from their secret chamber, and from church, to the society of their brethren ; forget them when they are called on to deny themselves in order to do good to one of their brethren ; forget them when they ought to sacrifice their own wishes to another's ; forget them when something happens to ruffle their temper, or try their patience, when they ought to do some disagreeable duty, or to take trouble to help others.

Many who are earnestly striving to follow Christ in His life, do not feel as much moved by the remembrance of His death as they wish. Many, too, who seem to themselves to be deeply and strongly impressed with a feeling of the great love of Christ, show, by their selfishness and want of care for their brethren, that their feelings are vain and fruitless ones. Christ does not care about men being moved to tears, or even to prayers, which for the moment are fervent and earnest, if these feelings pass away the next instant, and leave them lovers of themselves, and of the world, instead of followers of His footsteps. He has given us the true test, to try whether we are really touched by the greatness of His love to us. He showed His love to us not by words, not by feeling sorrow for our lost and miserable state, but by doing something to save us from it. He showed His love by becoming one of us, by putting Himself in our place. He showed His love by enduring all that was troublesome, all that was disagreeable, all that was hard, all that was painful, all that to flesh and blood seemed the worst evils that can happen to man. He showed His love by ministering to our wants, by healing our sick, by feeding our hungry, by comforting our

mourners. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."

And yet that was not enough. Besides our sicknesses and our sorrows, we had our sins. Besides the comforts which we want here on earth, against our vexations and our sad bereavements, we have death, which comes to each of us, and seems to make all comfort vain. Who should take away our sins? Who should overcome death? Who should receive us after our weary pilgrimage through life, into the mansions of the Father? That, too, Jesus Christ did for us, out of that love of His for us "which passeth knowledge." But to do that something more was necessary than to heal the sick or to raise the dead. To do that for us He must needs go through all that sinners deserve; He must needs be, though sinless, yet as a sinner. God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." To take away our sins He bore our sins Himself. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities:" "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." To overcome death He poured out His soul unto death. To open to us the Kingdom of Heaven He endured the sharpness of death and the darkness of the grave. So He showed us His love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That is the love of Jesus Christ. Who, indeed, can know it, and measure it to the full? But who can make any mistake as to what sort of love it was? We know what dying is; we know how we should feel if we had to die for another. "Scarcely for a righteous man will

one die." We know how hard we think it when a death which a man might otherwise have avoided comes to him in the way of duty; when a man catches his death by attending on a neighbour who is sick; when, for the sake of others, we place ourselves in the way of mischief which would otherwise have struck down and destroyed some one else. Such things are, indeed, done among men, and, God be thanked, often submitted to cheerfully and bravely. But no man seeks them. Yet this is the love that Christ showed us, that He *sought* death for us. We can understand so much, at least, of His love, and know how hard we should have found it; how hard we should find it, even now that we know what He did for us, to do the like for His sake.

But He says nevertheless, "This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." And He calls us "His friends," if we do that which He commands us. If we would know whether we duly honour and are really moved by the great love of our Master on this day, let us see how far we are really trying to help one another; how far we are really trying to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." There is no other way. The good thoughts and feelings which we have in church may deceive us. Let us go home and watch narrowly our tempers and our behaviour there. If we really understand the love of Christ crucified, the thought of our Master's suffering will be with us, to encourage us when we are trying to help our brethren; to reprove us when we are holding back from them in pride, or sloth, or selfishness; to comfort us when they meet our kindness with unkindness, or return evil for

good ; to make us love them doubly when they receive our services as we give them. When they are in pain and sickness the Cross of Christ will call us to their bedside ; will give us strength when we are worn out with serving them ; will make our voice gentle, and our step soft, and our hand tender, when we are ministering to them in their distress.

If they whom we are bound to help and please are rough and hard,—fretful when they ought to be satisfied, complaining and ever finding fault when we have done our best,—we shall think at once how our Master endured contradiction and vexation, and try to be silent and patient as He was. When we are tempted to think that we are our own masters ; that no one ought to interfere with us, and claim our services ; that we have a right to think first for ourselves, and next for others, we shall feel ashamed before the awful spectacle of love dying for others on the Cross ; for " Christ pleased not Himself ; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me." And how shall we dare indulge hatred and malice, how shall we dare vex our neighbour with bitter and cutting words, how shall we allow anger to burn up within us, how shall we dare to spread slanders and evil surmises about those whom we ought to love, even as Christ loved us,—how shall we dare, for very shame, endure in ourselves any of these things, before the thought of that Blessed One, who was afflicted and oppressed, yet opened not His mouth ; who, when the chief priests accused Him, and the multitudes wagged their heads, and the soldiers gave Him gall and vinegar, and the thieves railed on him, yet " answered nothing " ?

They only know and honour the love of Christ on the Cross who bear the remembrance of it about with them in the trials and duties of their daily lives. And if we would also come to feel it, to have such a sense as every true Christian must wish to have of its unspeakable greatness, we must begin by trying to imitate it. The reason why we feel so cold and dead on Good Friday,—why the reading of Christ's Passion seems so dull and tame to us,—is because we do not seek to catch the spirit of Christ crucified in our own actions. If you would know how to prize that love, and to enter into its sufferings and self-sacrifice, you must begin by practising the lesson of the Cross yourselves. Try and deny yourself some pleasure merely that you may give pleasure to another, and you will have made a step towards faintly yet really understanding the words and deeds of Him who pleased not Himself. Try and put yourself out of your way to do a service that you are not bound to do, and that is not expected of you; try and bear in good earnest the vexatious and disappointing things which every week brings to most men. Do not shrink from them, but try and force yourself to go about your work as if they had not happened; to keep down the heart that rises in pride, and restrain the tongue that longs to break forth into bitterness; and you will be driven in time, for comfort and support, to that which was meant for our comfort and support, and on which alone we can safely lean,—that "anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast,"—the remembrance of the Cross of our loving Master. So by degrees He will teach you Himself to know indeed the depth and the height of His love

on Mount Calvary ; so by degrees you will see new meaning and new light in what the Bible tells us of His works and ways in those awful hours. It will be no longer dead and cold to you, but its words will seem to pierce to the very bottom of your heart, words so full of meaning, so full of comfort, so full of His heavenly peace. And so He will train you on, as He did St. Paul, to make it your first aim and chief happiness to try more and more "to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."

## XI

# THE FEAR AND JOY OF THE RESURRECTION

"And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified."—ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 5.

THERE was, indeed, enough to cause fear to the boldest heart in what these faithful women found at the sepulchre of the Lord. They had come to do the last offices of love to His dead body. They had not been able to do them when He was laid in the grave, because the great Sabbath, which began in the evening, drew on; and He had to be laid hurriedly in the tomb, before the setting of the sun should give the signal for resting from all work. But the Sabbath was now over, and they had returned, to do what they could not do then. They came to look once more on that gracious countenance. They expected to find much that would draw tears and sighs; they expected to find everything in the regular course of nature. And in the regular course of nature there is not much to comfort those who go to visit the graves of their friends.

They thought only of their loss,—of a loss such as they had never seen repaired except by His hands:—

and now He was without power and life. The voice which had said, "Lazarus, come forth," had spoken its last words upon the cross. If even *He* had not been able to save Himself from death, who could have power to give Him life again? True, He had spoken of rising again, of seeing His friends again; but they thought not of these words of comfort now. Their sorrow was too heavy; after such an overthrow of all that they had hoped for, it seemed like a vain mockery to hope for anything more. There seemed nothing left for them to do but to bow their heads to God's will; to take their last leave of Him who had been so dear to them, and then to go their way, and bide their time, till they should be summoned to join Him in the abodes of death.

That was in their minds probably when they started, early in the morning, on the first day of the week, to see the sepulchre. They expected nothing uncommon now; no more strange works of love and mercy and power; nothing but that sight which they had looked at so long, and got but too well accustomed to, on the Friday evening,—the pale and still form of death.

They came, and they remembered as they drew near that a heavy stone had been rolled to close the sepulchre. "And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" So little did they think of any change in the course of nature; so little did they expect to find anything disturbed or altered in the stern law of man's last end; so little did they imagine of any help, or any power, which could bring comfort from the jaws of death.

They came; but there was nothing at the sepulchre as they expected to find it. The stone was rolled away. The Lord was not there. Well might they be astonished and fear at this; but the next moment brought the tremendous conviction that this was no work of man's hands; that the power of Almighty God had been there; that the law and course of nature had been disturbed, and some wonderful and mysterious thing had happened; that the bonds which no man had ever broken before were indeed burst asunder. They had been thinking of looking on a corpse without life and without power,—looking on it once more, before it was lost to them for ever in corruption and dust; and, all at once, they found themselves standing on ground where the greatest of miracles had just been wrought, and the traces of God's hand were still to be seen; and in the sepulchre, instead of the Lord's body wrapped in grave-clothes, they came upon the presence of mighty and glorious angels, filling the cave with light, and they heard voices of the other world. Truly, it was enough to cause fear and amazement thus to come suddenly from the thoughts and sorrows of earth, expecting to see only the common sights of this life,—the tomb as they had left it,—the everyday and familiar spectacle of death, —to come suddenly on beings fresh from the courts of heaven, and on a work of wonder and might such as no human eye had looked upon since the generations of mankind had been upon the earth.

Their first thoughts would surely be of fear: fear to see that the death of Christ had brought down upon earth such an awful interference of the power

of God; fear to find that the Master, whom they had known as so humble and lowly, was One to whom the strong bands of death were as nothing,—was One on whom angels in their glory were but attendants and ministers. Well may they have feared at the change so suddenly made in all their thoughts and feelings and expectations. Well may they have feared to find themselves so near to that lighting down of the Almighty's arm from heaven; so tremendous, even when displayed for their deliverance and comfort.

The Resurrection of Christ was an event to make men fear: all who were made to see its consequences at the time feared greatly. When the angel whose countenance was as lightning appeared to roll back the stone, the soldiers who were watching the sepulchre "for fear of him did shake, and became as dead men." The women, when they saw the angel, and heard his tidings, were sore afraid and terrified, and bowed their faces to the ground. The Apostles, after they had been prepared for the sight of their risen Master by the reports of those who had seen Him, were seized with awe and terror when at length He did appear. "As they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." Cannot you well understand that it must have been so? If any one whom we had known well were to be allowed to return to us from the world of spirits, could we bear the vision? Would it not be too much for us to endure, even if he came to bring us a message of peace from God, to comfort

us with the assurance of his being at rest, and of our certainty of joining him there? How much more awful to the disciples, when this was not a spirit, come back for a moment and then departing; but the very living body of Him whom they had seen crucified, and dying, and buried; come back to remind them of all that He had said to them of His power, and His care for them; come back to show them that He had indeed conquered even death; come back to tell them that all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth,—that He was indeed beyond all possibility of doubt the Son of God, in man's flesh and body, able to punish with a word all His enemies, and to save them to the uttermost who would trust His love.

But to them He said, "Fear not," as the angels had said to the faithful women, "Fear not ye." For in truth there were persons to whom neither Christ nor His angels could have said, "Fear not." There were persons who thought that they had got rid of Christ: that His reproofs and His threatenings, His holiness, which put to shame their lusts and covetousness,—His lowliness, which put to shame their pride,—His truth, which put to shame their hypocrisy,—His loving-kindness, His miracles of mercy and love, which put to shame their selfishness and cruelty, would never trouble them more;—that all this was put an end to for ever, and buried in the sepulchre of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. There were persons who thought that now they might go on as they had gone on before, outwardly religious and having the praise of men, inwardly serving divers lusts and sins; that now they might take their ease,

and eat and drink and be merry, because He who had troubled them was out of the way. If the Jewish rulers had really known how utterly all that they had reckoned on had been brought to nought, they might well have called on the mountains to fall on them, and the rocks to cover them, from the wrath of Him whom they had mocked and crucified,—of Him to whom they had been allowed to do their very worst, and who was now alive again from the dead.

As it was then, so is it now. Easter is a time of gladness and rejoicing, but it is also a time of fear. For Easter is the time which, above all others, reminds us that what Christ said He said in earnest; and that He has most certainly the power to do all that He has said. And there must be many to whom it can be no welcome news to be reminded of this. There are many to whom it would be more comforting to think that Christ had remained in the grave. There are many who would much rather think, if they could, that all that He said about the necessity of being holy and about the punishment of sinners had never been so confirmed and made good. There are many to whom it would be much pleasanter to remain in doubt for a while whether they *are* to rise again, and whether Christ is really to judge them,—to remain in doubt, to be able to think that it is not quite assured to them, at least while they have their fill of sin, and as long as they have not got tired of it. To such persons, to be reminded, as we are at Easter, that indeed Jesus Christ did not stay in the grave, but rose again to take His great power and reign, must be a troubling and a depressing thought,—a thought that commonly

brings with it anxiety and dismay the more they take it in.

Easter is the time which, above all others, speaks to us of a great change from old to new; from that which is of this world to that which belongs to the world to come; from the corruption and death which belonged to the old Adam to the holiness and life which has been brought in by the second Adam. *He* was changed at His resurrection; and each anniversary of it reminds us that if we are His *we* must be changing too. "If any man be in Christ," says St. Paul, "he is a new creature." "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." But what must *they* feel at Easter, if they feel at all,—what ought they to feel, who are not a whit altered from the bad courses and bad tempers of last year? What comfort can Easter give to those whom it finds without any improvement? They hear once more the joyful sound, "Christ is risen": "fear not ye." But are these words meant for them? Should *they* not fear who have passed the year since last Easter in sin; who have not made a step in it to please God; who hate His holy ways still? Is not Easter, as it returns, rather a fresh memorial and pledge to them that God will keep His word, not only to those who serve Him, but also to those who serve Him not?

To those who feel that they are not improving, Easter must be a time of fear. They must feel that the great festival forces on their minds what they try, and probably are able, to keep out of them the

rest of the year,—how great a change there must be in their souls before they can be like Jesus Christ. They are reminded by it how little their ways of life and their feelings chime in and agree with what Scripture says of Christians rising from sin to holiness, as their Lord rose from death to life. They must feel that they have nothing to do with the festival. It speaks, indeed, of comfort, but it is to those who have sought to follow Christ. It speaks of power to redeem and save, but it is not for those who will not leave off crucifying Jesus Christ afresh, by sins which they will not repent of and forsake. And every fresh Easter Day speaks of Christ's resurrection, as the certain pledge that our bodies also will be raised; and what thoughts but those of fear can any one have about the resurrection who knows that he loves this present world, with its pleasures and its pursuits, better than he loves the will and the promises of Christ? To such an one every Easter Day must be as one more melancholy and despairing step to a resurrection in which he will see, indeed, Christ's power, but will be cut off for ever from sharing His love.

But such thoughts of fear are not what Christ meant His resurrection to put into our minds. He meant it to say to us, as the angel said to the women, "Fear not ye." The women at the sepulchre, the apostles in the chamber, were greatly afraid at first; but soon their fear gave place to great joy. Jesus Christ came and gave them His peace, and it took possession of their hearts. Surely that is what He means for our portion still. He means that after we have fully felt the awfulness of His divine power, we

should go on to take comfort in the thought that He who is so great and mighty is also our Protector, the guide of our hearts, who watches night and day over our souls and bodies, in whose hands they will be safe through every trouble, through death itself, till He makes us like unto Himself. "Fear not ye," He says to those who tremble at His word, and humble their hearts before Him, in the deep consciousness how unworthy they have shown themselves of such salvation, and of such a Saviour. "Fear not ye," He says to those who are striving, by the help of His Spirit, to purify their hearts day by day from the pride or the vanity, the harsh tempers, or the selfishness,—the old leaven which yet spoils and embitters what must be made new and pure for His presence. "Fear not ye," He says to those who are waiting patiently, in sorrow or sickness, in old age, in penitence, for the consolation of the Israel of God. "Fear not ye," He says to those who, while they love His appearing, and pray for the coming of His kingdom, are content to remain in the calling to which He has called them, doing whatever their hand finds to do earnestly and quietly; fulfilling their homely tasks of charity and kindness, of peace-making and of consolation, comforting the sick, clothing the naked, teaching the ignorant, cheering the faint-hearted. To such the joy of Easter Day is indeed a new encouragement in their pilgrimage —a fresh spring, from year to year, of blessed hope and peace.

For what they feel to-day of calm and trustful gladness is not, indeed, of this world. It is like the peace which we may imagine God's servants to feel

when their course is finished, and they are preparing to depart. Please God, those who feel it now may humbly trust that it is a foretaste and first fruits of the comfort He will graciously vouchsafe them in their hour of departure. They may most surely believe that, if it shall please Him to accept and save them, it is a foretaste, feeble and poor indeed, yet not untrue and deceiving, of that love and joy which shall be in the resurrection of the just, when they shall for the first time see that Blessed One, and shall never more be separated from His presence.

## XII

## THE TREASURE IN HEAVEN

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
ST. MATTHEW vi. 21.

THE Ascension of our Lord into heaven, which we celebrate at this time, sets before our minds *where*, from henceforth, the treasure of Christians must be. It is the earnest to us, and the warning too, that what He has to give us is no earthly portion, but "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for us. It lifts our views, our hopes, what we have to live for and to think of, from a course of things which must be all over in a few years, to one which shall have no end, of which the blessedness and glory will be such that man will have no cause to envy even the angels. Christ by going up on high has taken with Him our treasure, and removed it from where moth and rust corrupt to the everlasting throne. There He is,—all that we have to put our trust in, and to satisfy the desire of our souls,—all that we have in this world to calm our anxious thoughts of the future, to still our fears, to give us certainty and assurance that, amid the distress and sorrow of this present state, and the dreary end of death, we have a friend

who will never fail, a Redeemer whose love is inexhaustible, a stay and hope on which we may throw all our burdens. Great, we all know, is the value and blessedness of a friend on earth, but the friend whose love and goodness are above that of all friends is in a better place than earth: gone before us, but not gone away from us,—out of our sight yet ever seeing us, ever knowing our necessities, ever hearing our prayers; gone before us, that where He is we may come,—that He may receive in heaven those whom He has loved, and who have loved Him in this short life on earth. Our treasure is not here. Christ has made heaven belong to men, as it belongs to the angels.

And the angels look on, and see that it is true. They see that something much greater than earth is given us. They see that what men are meant for, are called to, and promised,—what is laid up in store for them, is in heaven. The angels see, and wonder, and rejoice at the destiny, the inheritance, which the Lord has won and appointed for us men, —a throne in heaven. Can they also see us, and our thoughts and lives, as they see what is waiting for us above? Can they see how much we think and care about that glorious hope which lies before us? Can they see how much our hearts are set on that treasure in heaven, which belongs to us, as the followers of our Risen and Ascended Lord?

We, my brethren, do not want angels to tell us where our hearts ought to be. We do not want teaching to make us know that if our treasure is indeed in heaven, our hearts ought to be in heaven too. If Christ is gone up on high, and if He is

gone to prepare a place for us, who can doubt that Christians, though they have to live and work for a while on earth, were meant to think of themselves as persons whose main interests are, so to speak, removed from this present world to heaven? Who can doubt that they must be Christians to little purpose *if*, with such hopes and prospects before them, they never raise their minds to those hopes,—if they live indifferent to those prospects? When we keep in memory our Master's ascension to glory, and His promise of His glory to us, surely the first thought that must come into our souls is, that they who have been so blest ought to bear a heavenly mind; the first question that must strike us is, whether our hearts and thoughts are indeed those of persons whose portion is in heaven, who have heaven in view, who have already their Master and best Friend in heaven? "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." But where are our hearts *now*?

Surely, no one can be really a Christian who has not something of a heavenly mind,—who does not try to lift up his thoughts and feelings to that holy place where he knows that his Saviour is, and is waiting for him? And yet how difficult, amid the work and troubles of the world, to bear this heavenly mind; to keep ourselves from sinking down to thoughts which never look a step beyond what we see and do on earth; how difficult really to believe, to remember, that we are citizens of a heavenly country; that there is really another world of much more consequence to us than this one, which now fills up all our thoughts and takes up all our time;

how difficult to raise our eyes and wishes and hopes above the common daily circumstances, the cares, and business, and pleasures of this life, and to feel that indeed we have to do with something much greater, something that will last for ever—some one, a king, a master, a friend, a judge, whom we shall meet with when we are dead, either to be with Him in the light of heaven, or to live, cast away from His presence, in the outer darkness, with the worm that never dies.

And if it is so difficult to have this thought of heaven, what ought we not to do, what trouble ought we not to take, to remind ourselves of it,—to stir up and revive the faint and dim image of the treasure which we have in heaven, when it is clouded and almost blotted out by earthly cares? Is there nothing by which we may help ourselves in this? Is there nothing beyond our own weak wishes and intentions, which so often turn out vain? Many of us live a hard life of toil and labour, with no time to read, no time to shut ourselves up from the world and think, no time to be alone with God, and to shut out the pressing things of this world. Is there no help for such persons against the overwhelming cares and trials of daily life,—cares which wake with them in the morning and leave them no quiet till they lie down at night? Is there nothing to help in such a life as this? Is there no time, no place, to be fenced off from this world, for exalting, sanctifying moments, to help them to lift up their minds to their treasure above, and in heart and mind thither to ascend, and there continually dwell?

Is there such a time? Is there such a place? Is there a day out of the busy and weary week which belongs to God, which recalls the rest of heaven? Is there a place where the world has no business, where all that is said and done brings up the thought of God; where, as we hope, we may indeed meet with God, where we may speak to Him with more than usual solemnity and stillness; a place which reminds us of our eternal home,—the Font of Baptism speaking to us of an endless life begun and a heavenly inheritance bestowed; the Altar and Table of the Lord speaking to us of eternal life purchased for us by His Death, and nourished in us by His heavenly Food; the graves all round of friends and neighbours, speaking to us of death, and things after death? Is there any service and employment which may recall and refresh in our minds the hopes, the words, the work of heaven, where one day we trust our work is to be,—where one day we look forward to joining the songs of angels, and the hymn before the great white Throne? Oh, my brethren, is there such a work done on earth? is there such a place, is there such a time, which God has given us, on purpose that hard-worked men may for a little space remember that they still are His children, heirs of His everlasting kingdom, sharers in the treasure which is in heaven?

You who feel that your heart *ought* to be where your treasure is, and yet feel that it is not; you who wish continually that you could bear a more heavenly mind, and yet feel that it has but a bad chance against the things of this life, which take up

your time and fill your heart; you who grieve and are vexed with yourselves that you cannot lift up your thoughts to your heavenly calling, cannot make this world give way for ever so little to the remembrance of the next, cannot keep before you the hope of heaven to sanctify and raise your earthly life,—have you ever fairly thought what helps you have, if you would use them? Have you thought what Sunday might do for you? Why does Sunday come round, why is it fenced off and separated from the six days of the week, but to break the continual pressure on our thoughts of earthly things, to give us a chance of escaping from them, into a quiet and rest, in which heaven may for a while open to our souls, to give us the opportunity of shaking off what binds us to this life, and of fixing our thoughts on where we are going to, and on what we hope to have at last? You have your Sundays, week after week, reminding you of God's rest, and of the rest which He has prepared for you. In the midst of this world's labour He gives you even here your day of rest. In the darkest of this world's sorrow Sunday seems a day different from other days, shining with a light and place of its own, even into the chamber of sickness and death. You have your Sunday; and with Sunday come also its calls, and invitations, its helps and means of grace.

God has set in the midst of you, as the ever-present witness and figure of heaven, His holy House of Prayer. There it stands, built for no earthly purpose, different in shape, and in all things belonging to it, from earthly habitations, speaking

only of heaven, and heavenly uses, and heavenly gifts, and heavenly blessings; the gate of heaven when we are brought into it as little children to Christ,—the gate of heaven, if so God grant us, when we are brought to it, and pass through it the last time on our way to our grave beside it. And here we meet our God. Here we may come on our day of rest, and be safe, if we will, from any thoughts but those of the world to come. Here we gather together for no earthly business, but for a purpose of one sort only; and that purpose is the same for which saints and angels are met together in that innumerable company before the throne of God. If there is a place on earth which, however faintly and dimly, shadows out the courts of God on high, surely it is where His people are met together, in all their weakness and ignorance and sin, in their poor and low estate, yet with humble and faithful hearts, in His House of Prayer. There His Name only is heard, His law declared: His are the promises, the warnings, the words:—all things recall Him, all is done in His Name, to Him all confessions, all prayers, all praises are addressed. If we only thought of what we were doing, we should see that we are practising here on earth what will be our life in heaven,—we are rehearsing the songs which we hope to sing with the redeemed in heaven. We are joining together, one with another, rich and poor, young and old, small and great, into an image and likeness of that great family of God hereafter, which will know no will, no work, but His,—which will be for ever in His presence, to whom He is the shelter from all evil and sorrow, the Light that never

sets, their ever-satisfying and yet ever-increasing hope.

We have, many of us, abundance of helps and means of grace to set against the hindrances of the works and cares of life, and to keep alive in our heart the remembrance of our treasure in heaven. But we have, all of us, even the poorest, the Sunday of rest, to remind us of the everlasting rest, and to give us time to think of God, and lift our hearts without hindrance to Him. We have, all of us, the Church open to us; open, because there is a heaven waiting for us of which it is the present memorial and figure; open, because there is a God to be remembered, whom with united hearts and voices we are called on to meet, and worship together. We have, all of us, the Church services, morning and evening, speaking to us of God, and all that He has done for us, stirring us up to listen to and give attention to His gracious message,—speaking out our thoughts for us, and putting words in our mouths, when we would repent of sin, and take hold of forgiveness; when we would ask for grace and strength; when we would commit ourselves to our Master's keeping; when we would sing our Master's praises, and, in singing them, rise on wings of faith to the hallelujahs of that multitude that no man can number, of the saints of heaven.

If we would use these means of grace and memorials of our heavenly portion, and use them as men use what they believe to be for their profit, we should find that we were not without much to help us in keeping up the recollection of that heaven where our Master is gone, and the sense and

value of that treasure which passeth all understanding, which He has there in His keeping for us. If the thought of it was driven out during the week-days, there would be a hope that it would come back naturally when the Sunday rest brought back its remembrances of heaven, and the Sunday solemn gathering of worshippers made us think of that world for which they and we are preparing, to which they and we are on our way. For God has given us Sundays, set apart churches, and appointed the regular unceasing round of services, where Christians may meet to strengthen each other's faith and purposes of good,—where He, too, has promised to meet them with His grace, and bless them with His presence, and dismiss them with His peace.

And now I will tell you why I have dwelt on these thoughts to-day. It is because I feel with sadness that many in this place do not value as they ought these memorials and helps to keep religion and the fear of God in their minds; because I see, with distress and pain, that they do not use them. It used to be a way of speaking, in describing a good, earnest, humble Christian,—not as if it were any such great praise, but as showing that he really wished to honour his God and Saviour, and try to be His true servant,—that he never missed his church on Sunday. It meant, at any rate, that he was a regular attendant at the church which God had provided for him, and where his friends and neighbours met together to worship God; where his father and forefathers had prayed, and been taught God's Word; where their graves were round him, and where he might look to be

gathered to them. I am afraid that good old feeling is very slack among us, of worshipping together as one parish and congregation, of showing God honour publicly by joining all together in His House on His Day, of encouraging and stirring up one another by each doing his part in keeping up the remembrance of God's Name and fear. I know that many of you are regular. I know that there may be good reasons keeping you away from time to time. I know that there are times when you wish, quite rightly and innocently, to spend your Sunday elsewhere. But, allowing all this, it is not enough to account for the fact that many are *far more* Sundays away from church here than they are at it. It is not enough to explain the emptiness of our church on Sunday mornings,—on Sunday mornings, when the service is the most complete and most beautiful, when the service of praise is the most glorious and exalting, when the prayers for all good are so fully and so touchingly set forth in the Litany, when the Communion service reminds us continually of that Holy Sacrament in which we are called to be partakers.

Shall I tell you what is the most painful hour of the week to me?—the hour that, week by week, makes me feel that all I have said has been wasted, and done no good? that makes me doubt whether I am doing any good here? It is the time when I come into church on Sunday morning and see it so empty of worshippers, and think of the reasons which keep them away, and of the dishonour done to our Almighty Father. I know indeed, better than any of you can, how awful is the

thought of that account and reckoning which I must one day give, for you, before the judgment-seat of God. But, dear brethren, remember this, that my fault will not excuse you,—will not make it right for you to do dishonour to God, and slight His means of grace. I may suffer; but it will not help you to escape. If I have not spoken as well as I ought, you know of your own selves that it cannot be right to be negligent and irregular in giving God the honour due to Him; that it cannot be right, from custom or fashion, or from laziness and want of will, or for any other excuses, to stay away from God's House on His Holy Day, when you might go there; that it cannot be right merely to go there when it suits your fancy or convenience, instead of as a matter of duty to God and your brethren.

I have never taught you that regular church-going by itself would save you. But surely it is a true and sad sign against a man having the beginnings of the power of God, when He is a careless and seldom worshipper. The world soon puts out of all our hearts the thought of our treasure in heaven, do what we may. Oh, my brethren, let me beseech you earnestly not to trifle with the gracious means which God has appointed to keep up the remembrance of His Holy Name, of His wonderful benefits, of that unspeakable Peace, which He has prepared for those who love and seek Him.

May He help us all, and may we all help one another, to correct what may be amiss, to strengthen what stands, to raise up what is fallen back. May He, by His goodness, keep continually before our hearts and minds the thought of what He has done

for us, and of what He has in store for us above; so that we may never lose it, never be false to it, but find it brightening, enlarging, becoming stronger, more real, more powerful in our hearts, as we go on drawing nearer to the end; till the days of hope are over, and the treasure which we so often heard of, and thought of, is made our own for ever.

## XIII

# THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

"Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth."—PSALM civ. 30.

THE Psalmist is speaking in these words of that great burst of new life which is going on all around us at this time of the year. The Spirit of God, which once moved on the face of the waters, to fill the earth with light and life, still works; still comes forth year by year to turn winter into spring and summer, to repair the waste of decay and death. "Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled,"—all things which God hath made upon the earth: darkness comes, and failing strength, and cold and winter; and the year that was once so bright ends in gloom and sadness. "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." Then comes the change. "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit," as at the beginning; "they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth."

But to-day these words sound in our ears with a deeper meaning. When we hear them now, they speak of a greater and more wonderful renewing than that wrought by the power of God working in the trees and fields, and all the tribes of living things.

To-day the thoughts which they awaken and the associations they bring with them are of the Day of Pentecost, and its effects upon mankind; of the new life given to dead souls by the quickening power of the Lord, who is the Giver of Life; of the springtide of goodness and holiness in a corrupt world; of the changing of our decayed and ruined nature; of the fresh growth in the heart of man, in faith and love and truth; of the restoration to God, their Father and Saviour, of the creatures so long lost to Him, ruled over by sin, and swallowed up by death.

This was what was to follow, and what has followed, the "coming of the Holy Ghost": the coming of the Holy Ghost, not merely into the world, not merely to be *with* men, but,—most blessed and wonderful thought,—to be *in* them; to dwell in them, to give them a new life. To-day we call to mind the first beginnings of that coming down of the Holy Spirit upon and into man, which is the proof and pledge of reconciliation and peace between man and God. *He* was come who was to make all things new; the new witness of God, not outside of man, but within him, to begin the work which has never stayed from that day, and never will stay till the Lord returns; the work of purifying and restoring the generations of mankind.

"Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created:" one after another, age after age, the successions of Christian people, each in their own time born anew, and created to good works, running their race and doing their master's service. "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created,"—the innumerable company of God's elect, who have given to the world a

life and beauty and glory which it never had before. "Thou renewest the face of the earth." This is that renewal of the face of the earth, that new spring of holiness and hope and peace, which we cannot help having in our thoughts when we hear words which speak of all nature, once more quickened into spring and life by the invisible grace of God.

That which we keep in mind to-day was the coming into the world of a divine power, which has acted, really though invisibly, on the hearts of men, and made them different from what they ever were, or ever could be before. It was the coming into the world of a divine Helper to man, in the inward, secret depths of his soul and conscience,—of a divine Enlightener; teaching him, as he never knew before, the truth about himself, the truth about God, the truth about righteousness and sin, the truth about his end, his judgment, his destiny. It was the coming of a Sanctifier and Purifier and Healer, who was indeed Divine,—able to turn and raise man's thoughts and will from what God hates to what God loves,—able to give him power to do the good that he would do, and resist the sin that he ought not to do,—able by degrees, step by step, to give him victory over his temptations, and to make him rise step by step to understand, to love, and to follow the mind that was in Christ Jesus. It was the coming of a divine power, which has made the change between the Jewish and the heathen world, as it was before, and that which has been seen among men since they have had the Gospel knowledge.

If our knowledge of God is clearer than that of heathen; if prophecies which were dark to Jews are

plain to us; if a fellowship and communion with our Father in heaven are granted to us which they could not claim; if the mystery of our sins and our forgiveness is declared to us in the Cross of Jesus Christ; if the hope of what is to come is opened to us, as not even good and holy men under the old covenant were allowed to have it; if we know more of heaven, if we see clearer through death, if we can trust more surely in trials and temptations—it is because for us the Spirit of God has been given. If we have wider, purer, higher views of our duty; if Christians have reached a standard of goodness and holiness of which we have no examples before Christ came; if measures of obedience which satisfied Jews are seen, even by the disobedient, to be utterly below what is worthy of a Christian; if conscience is more tender and more far-sighted and speaks more strongly—it is that Spirit of newness and light which has enlarged our hearts. And if we see in all ages since Christ came, works of love and mercy, works of self-devotion and self-sacrifice, care for the bodies and souls of men, care for the humblest, the miserable, the worn out and useless, care for the infinite varieties and shades of human suffering, such as were never dreamed of before; if we see men giving all they have, and then themselves, in the service of God and their brethren—it is He who has kindled the enthusiasm and the inventiveness of charity. If we see purity, meekness, tenderness, joined with fiery zeal; if we see unworldliness with the spirit of forgiveness and forbearance for others, as we see them in St. Paul, St. John, and St. Peter,—and not in them only, but in so many who in all ages have followed St. Paul's and St.

John's Master,—if it has come to pass that the Saints of the New Covenant have a higher idea of holiness, have walked by a more perfect rule, have shown forth a more excellent and lovely character, these are the fruits of that Blessed Spirit who has come to renew the face of the earth.

We may feel ourselves nearer to God than of old, adopted by stronger warrants into His family, and assured more certainly of our interests in His Kingdom; we, instead of the sacrifices of bulls and goats, have the one all-sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction of the only Son; instead of the outward ceremony and seal of circumcision, we have the life-giving Sacrament of regenerating Baptism, in the name of the awful and most Holy Godhead, by which we can come to God as our Father indeed. We, instead of the sinful and dying High Priest entering once a year into the Holy Place, have ever at the mercy-seat above, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, without beginning of days or end of life, who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin; we, instead of the Passover and the manna, speaking of Egypt and the Red Sea and the wilderness, have the Sacrament which tells of the victory over death, and we feed upon the food which nourishes us to everlasting life. Whence is all this,—whence is it that our eyes are opened, and that we know truths that are behind the veil, and the powers of the world to come, but because the Spirit hath come and taught us, and given us life? The Spirit of Truth, according to our Master's promise, has come, and has shown us all that was meant by our Master's words, all that was really done in what

He went through. The Spirit came, and threw light on the meaning of the Incarnation, the Temptation, the Agony, the Cross, the Resurrection. The Spirit made Christians understand what was in the words, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." "This is My Body; this is My Blood: do this in remembrance of Me."

The Spirit brought to remembrance what He had said, and wrote it not merely in words and books, but in the tables of the heart, in the wills and affections, in the belief and deeds of living men. Knowledge and duty, and the grace to do it, and the face of life, and the worth of time, and the thoughts of death, are all new to us; for the Spirit of God has come down to be with us, the Spirit of God is now in the hearts of men; new things have been done, old things have been seen in a new light; for the power and enlightening of the Spirit has come into the midst of man's life. "He has renewed the face of the earth."

And in the midst of this communication of power and light from heaven, we have our lot, we live our lives. We are not talking of things past and absent when we speak of the Spirit of God given to men, dwelling in the hearts of men, making them new, teaching, strengthening, sanctifying them. What was begun at Pentecost was to last for ever. Not in its first marvels and wonderful signs, not in its rushing wind and cloven tongues and diverse languages and gifts of healing. But in its real power, in its real influence on the soul of man, in its real comfort, in its divine communication of holiness and strength and peace. This was for all the world. This was

for all time. Heaven was once more united to earth not merely by the outward sign of the Lord's ascension, and by holding on its throne Him who had walked about on earth; but by the invisible inward flowing forth of that Spirit, who is the power and love of God, from the Father and the Son to those for whom the Father had sent the Son to die,—to those whom the Son had loved with His Divine Charity. And this knitting together of the visible and invisible, of heaven and earth, of God and man, —this was the very thing for which Christ had come and died and gone up again. He had Himself done all His great works *outside* of us. The Spirit was to come when He had departed, to bring the redeeming, restoring, and healing grace *within* us.

This is the truth: the awful, solemn truth. The Spirit of God and Christ, the Eternal Spirit who came down in wonders at Pentecost, is with us now. He has been with us since our Baptism, when He received us; He has been with us as we grew up, teaching us all the good we have ever learnt, and striving with us when we chose evil instead of good. He has been with us, showing us our danger and our sin, throwing His light into our conscience, inclining us—and we so unwilling and so obstinate—to pray in earnest; delivering us from many a temptation; giving us the thought, the strength, which perhaps just saved us on the edge of falling; awakening us with disquiet and fear when we fell; filling us with peace and calmness of spirit when we stood fast.

All that we have of good is from Him; and how much more would He have given us, if we had not resisted Him, if we had not tempted and grieved

Him! To the greatest saints, to St. Paul, to St. John, He has been all that made them what they were; and the same Spirit, the same Divine Person, who was with them and in them, is with us, and in us too. He met them where He meets us. Do not let us think that it was in those extraordinary visitations and open signs of His presence that His grace and life-giving power to their souls was most largely shown. He met them as He meets us, in secret quiet thoughts, in prayer and praise and sacrament, in the holy words of God, in Christian communion and the assembling of the Church, in thoughts that come with the night watches or the dawning of the day; in the secret strivings with temptations and sins, in the fulfilment of duty, in the zealous honouring of God, in unselfish services of love, in the earnest endeavour after a better and purer life. By this daily unseen training, by this secret, unnoticed, but mighty discipline, and not by outward shows of power or passing raptures of feeling, He made them saints. As He dealt with them, so He deals with us; so He deals with all Christian people, as they pass through their trial, and are waiting for their summons.

This is the gift which our Master has left us. Thus is He still ready to answer the prayer that He will not leave us fatherless, and without guide and protector in the world. Let *that* but come into our souls; and, if the world seems dark, He can make it glorious and full of hope; if religion seems dry and unmeaning, He can pour light into all its parts, making them start into brightness and reality and comfort. If we are dead and dull and cheer-

less, His life can make us live. He visits the souls of men, in the truth and efficacy of His power, unseen, unfelt by man; known only by its fruit, by the peace it leaves behind. He comes from heaven to be our guard and shield; and without Him nothing is strong, nothing is holy, nothing is safe. To His keeping let us commit ourselves: to Him who gave us new life in our Baptism,—to Him who was so solemnly appealed to in our confirmation to be ever with us,—to Him who, if ever we have had thoughts of good, or have been comforted and blessed in prayer, has surely graciously come to us then.

Let us pray Him that He will mercifully continue and finish His heavenly work in us; that He will wash away what is unclean, that He will heal what is sick and wounded, that He will send His gracious rain on what is withered, that He will bend our stiff pride, and warm our coldness, and restrain our waywardness. We have yet a while to toil and strive, to pass through the fire of temptation, to mourn and to be sorrowful; but He came that to men in toil He might give rest, to men in sorrow He might give refreshment and consolation, to men in trial He might give strength. His stores of gifts and grace are not exhausted. Only let us have faith and will to seek for them; then we may hope to find Him our stay and refuge, and the light of our hearts; then may we humbly look forward to knowing something of His sweet welcoming influences when all things here are passing away. For He, even in the hour of death, can, to those who trust Him, "renew the face of the earth."

## XIV

## THE DUTY OF HELPING MISSIONARY WORK

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."—1 ST. PETER iv. 10.

SUCH is the Apostle's rule, or rather God's rule, given through His Apostle, of the way in which we are to use what God has given us; the rule of mutual service, by means of, and in proportion to, the power which God has given us to help one another. And of course the rule holds good of all the actions of our lives. Whatever we have, whatever we can do, is God's free gift to us, is God's talent committed to our stewardship,—to take care of and use for the Master's service, and for our brethren's good.

Manifold is His grace, manifold and different are the separate gifts which He bestows upon men. And what He gives He gives us not for ourselves alone, but for others also. He gives to us not that we may say in our hearts, "This is my own; I may do what I like with it," but that we may be able, in the manifold wants and needs of our brethren around us, to contribute to their good or to their comfort. What different lives should we lead, what a different world it would be, if we really tried in ever so small

a degree to act upon this view of our place on the earth, and of the reason why God sent us into it: namely, that all we have is God's, and from God; and that His reason for giving us what we have,—health and strength, or money, or skill, or understanding,—was not that we might use these things only for our own profit or pleasure, but for the profit and pleasure of others. We can none of us do without one another. There is nothing, there is no man, solitary and by himself, and needing no help from others. God means all His manifold gifts to be part of a common stock. He gave to others for our sake; He gave to us for their sake.

This is true of all God's gifts—that is, of all that we have and enjoy and use in the world. If it be true of the least of God's gifts that, according as each has received, so ought we to "minister one to another as good stewards," much more must this be true of the greatest of His gifts. That great gift we keep in mind to-day. That greatest of all His gifts is that fulfilment of our Saviour's promise, which began in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, and has continued even to this day. When God sent down His holy Spirit into the hearts of men, He may almost be said to have done all that could be done for sinful man on this side the grave. He gave him that which was to turn religion from something outward into something inward; which was not only to give him new knowledge about God, about himself, about eternal things, but also to light up and kindle this knowledge into faith and love and hope; He gave him that which was to change and make new his heart;

to cleanse and purify it from the sin which had been born and had grown up with it; to put new strength, new thoughts, new desires, into it; to form a link and a bond between man and God, between earth and heaven, which no trials or sorrows or losses in this life could break, and of which death itself was but the seal. All that makes the religion of Jesus Christ different from all other religions,—all that makes it one not of forms and words, but of inward consolation and hopes,—all that makes it a worship of the Father of Spirits, in spirit and in truth,—hangs upon and flows from the gift of the Spirit. It is that which has raised our lot above all other men's; above the kings and prophets of God's ancient people, above the great and the wise men of the heathen. What has been given to us is not merely a revelation and unfolding of God's truth, but a power in our hearts to take in that truth; an inward fellowship with the Spirit of God, a living and life-giving grace, by which our spirits are brought near to God, and are taught His will, and are made to feel sure, with joy and hope, of the reality of things unseen.

Is then this great gift, this purifying and spiritualising and making inward of all religion, is it for ourselves alone? Has God sent it to us, to each for himself only? Has He sent it to our nation and Church for our own good, and for nothing else? Did He so send it to His first Apostles? Was it for them alone,—for their comfort and guidance and salvation only,—that the fiery tongues descended and lighted on their heads, and that under that power from heaven they burst forth into the praises

of God in all languages of the earth? Was it for themselves, for a show of their new power, or for their own instruction, that the assembled multitudes heard them speak, each man in the tongue wherein he was born, the wonderful works of God? Surely, far from it. It was indeed, in all its fulness, a gift to them. It was the making good, to the chosen friends of Christ, of their Master's promise of His peace and joy and victory over the world, that the Holy Ghost came down to them: it was to them the arrival of the expected Comforter. But it came to them that, through them, it might stream forth to the world. It came to them that they might be preachers of the Word and ministers of the Spirit to Jew and heathen, to the ends of the earth. It came, that the fire kindled in their hearts might spread and embrace all nations of the world; as we said this morning in giving thanks for the great miracle of Pentecost, "whereby we have been brought out of darkness and error into the clear light and true knowledge of Thee, and of Thy Son Jesus Christ." It came to them, that from them it might come on to us. It has come from them to us; and do you think that it has come to us that it might stop here? Has it reached even to us, and have we nothing to do, think you, to send it on beyond us?

*There* is the plain broad ground for these efforts to convert the heathen, for which I am to ask your sympathy and help to-day. The law of the Gospel of Christ was that it was to be an ever-spreading religion. It was at first given and committed to a very few, and they were on all sides to hand it on

to more; and all, as they received it, received it with the same solemn command from their Lord,—spread it all round you wherever you go, wherever it can reach. You know how that command was fulfilled by Christ's Apostles; how they pushed forward from land to land, from city to city, never thinking that they had done enough while there was anything still to do. You can follow St. Paul in the Acts; how he hastes onward from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Antioch to Cyprus, from Cyprus to Lystra and Derbe and Iconium, to Ephesus and the cities of Asia; then, following across the sea the vision calling him, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Then, through the lands of barbarian and civilised, through mocking Greek and persecuting Jewish multitudes, preaching the Gospel where no one had preached it before, lest he should be entering on other men's labours; passing from the great cities of the Greeks, Athens and Corinth, cities of the rich and the learned and the wise,—like our London and Paris,—into the depth of the roughest and wildest countries of his age, even unto Illyricum, to preach the Gospel of Christ. Then, when he had conquered for Christ in the east, pressing onward to the west,—to Italy, to Rome, perhaps to Spain, perhaps to the utmost isles of the west,—to our own England. But how far he went we know not; we lose sight of him still pressing forward, as we lose sight of a ship pushing out to sea, or a traveller plunging into a thick wood or a wilderness. *Where* he ended his course we cannot tell for certain; all we know is that, the last sight we had of him, he was still pressing onward to carry yet to new hearers, to

hitherto untaught races of the Gentiles, his Master's message, his Master's gift of the Spirit.

St. Paul is but one of the Apostles whose history is more particularly told us; but what he did the others did too. With them it was that "their sound is gone out into all lands: and their words into the ends of the world." With them it was always to fulfil the saying that "To whom He was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand." No one could doubt, in this case, how they had interpreted the great command of Christian communication of God's gifts, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

We are not Apostles, it is true, nor entrusted with Apostles' work. But we are Christians. And while we have been called, by God's unfathomable counsels, to know and hope in Him, others—other nations and races of men, many times more numerous than ourselves—are not yet called. And as long as there are brethren in the world not knowing their God and Father, and sitting in the shadow of death, Christians can never shake off the debt they owe to God, and to their brethren, of handing on to them, as far as they can, what they have themselves received.

If there were no other reason why we should send missionaries among the heathen, there would be no escaping the obligation we are under, from remembering the way in which the Gospel was brought to us. The thought sometimes rises in our hearts, when we are unbelieving or indifferent, or out of humour, or grudge our money—What have we to do with all

these heathen? We have more than enough to do at home. God's providence has left them in darkness, and it is for God's providence to call them out of it when He pleases; but what have you or I, who never saw them, who know nothing about them, to do, to spend our money, or give our thoughts, to try and give a little light to them? And after all (we may go on to say), for the little that we can do, why is it worth while to take so much pains? Missionaries do but little. They work for many years, and if, after that, they have gathered a few souls together, they think they have done a great work. And what are these among the millions untaught, untouched by the Gospel, who never can possibly hear a missionary's voice? It seems almost, as it were, like counting the waves of the sea, or the leaves of the wood, or the clouds of the sky, or the grass of the field. It is as if we were to try and remove the sand of the sea-shore, by taking it grain by grain away. What a hopeless battle, what a vain and useless toil! Why not stay quiet at home and mind our own business, and leave the heathen,—whom, do what we may, we can do so little for,—to the God who made them?

I will say that I do not wonder at any one at times feeling, and even saying, this. It is natural, and seems at first sight like the plain sense of the matter. But besides that we cannot get over the plain will and command of God, that we should spread His Gospel through the world, there is this short answer to all this reasoning. It is that if people in former days had reasoned like this, and acted on these principles, we here in England should

never have been Christians at all. If people in former days had said, "What have we to do with the heathen in that distant barbarian island? why should we take the trouble to convert and enlighten them?" we might still have been worshipping stocks and stones. If people in former days had been frightened by the difficulty and hopelessness of the task of attacking the superstitions and idolatries of fierce thousands and ten thousands of barbarians; if they had said, "What can we do,—we, a few scattered helpless men, with nothing but truth and God's Word to help us; how is it possible that those fierce, wild men will listen to the call to be pure and gentle and loving; or, if a few do, what are they in the crowds of their countrymen, strong and obstinate, and bigoted to the customs of their fathers?"—if, I say, people in former days had, from fears like these, shrunk from the attempt to teach our forefathers the Gospel, where, do you think, at this day would be all the glory and peace and greatness which we prize so much? Where would be the millions among us who do not name that Name in vain?

I can assure you of this. Take any account which you may meet with now of the savageness, the ignorance, the terrible darkness and superstitions of the heathen tribes of Africa, or the islands of the sea, and it can be matched by what we read of the people who lived in England when the Gospel was first sent here. It is true that when we read the accounts given by travellers of the heathen, they seem like different creatures from ourselves,—as if God had not made of one blood all the nations

under heaven; as if they were too childish, too stupid, too debased and degraded, too cruel, too hard-hearted, ever to receive our teaching, ever to feel as we do, and love what we love. I can only say that those in former days who had the knowledge of Christ, when our forefathers were still in ignorance of Him, might have said just the same of our forefathers. The accounts of them are written down; their customs, their doings, their fierceness and wildness and bloodthirstiness, were well known. And they, too, were much more proud and terrible and confident in themselves than the savages are, for the most part, now. But the Christians of those days, who lived, as we live, in more settled and enlightened countries, who could have their share of ease and quiet without troubling themselves about distant barbarians, felt that the Gospel was not to stop at themselves; felt themselves debtors even to these unknown barbarians, to try and bring them within their Master's fold. They came to us, and tried. They did not shut up their hearts to us, and refuse us their interest, because we were so far off and so different. They were not daunted by the numbers of the heathen, by what seemed to human reckonings the uselessness of the attempt. They came, and they sent their preachers, in faith. They trusted that God, who had given His command to spread His Gospel, would do what seemed impossible to man.

Here is, in a word, the *human* cause of the conversion of England. A minister of God, living far away from this island, was inflamed with love and pity for its people, our *then* heathen countrymen and forefathers. He desired for them the heritage of the

angels in heaven. He could not go himself, but he got others to go. A few humble, helpless men, with the Cross of Christ and the Book of God, landed on our shores. There was opposition; there was difficulty; there was labour that seemed in vain. Over and over again all seemed lost; over and over again the work had to be begun anew. It was not done in a generation, or in a century. But that good man who longed for the conversion of heathen England to Christ, and who dared to attempt it, has had his wish. He did not see it. He only saw what might have seemed then its feeble and hopeless beginnings. But his work went on and prospered. What could not be done at once has been done in time. And here is this great realm and Church of England, not the least among the kingdoms of the world which acknowledge the name of Christ, the mother of new nations, the planter of new churches,—where, through its length and breadth, in cities and cottages, the Light of the World is shining,—owing all its blessings, owing its knowledge of the Gospel, owing all to the warm love and far-seeing faith and hope, which refused to be frightened, of one old man far away.

Do you think that all you can do is so little that it is not worth doing? that all you can give is so trifling that it is not worth giving? That will not stop you if you listen to God's rule: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another." Nothing is more striking in the rules and commands of the New Testament than their equity and reasonableness and fairness. There is no laying of the same burden on unequal shoulders.

No doubt it calls on us to do our best,—to do it truly and honestly; but the seriousness with which it makes this claim is shown in the just and even way in which it measures each man's duty by each man's ability. But let us remember that if we could fairly do more, and do not do it, the equity, which does not claim from us more than we can do in proportion to our gifts and powers, will judge us.

And when, on a day like this, we call to remembrance, first, the great gift sent down from heaven of God's Holy Spirit; and next, how wonderfully, by God's mercy, the knowledge and the admission to this gift of truth and comfort has been brought nigh to ourselves, we ought to feel that we owe some token of our thankfulness to God for His mercies to ourselves. We owe Him, first of all, a thankful heart and a holy life as long as we live; but, over and above this, we owe Him a special duty of endeavouring to do for others what has been done for us,—of handing on the light of His truth and salvation to men who have not heard of them. We have received largely and bountifully. We are accustomed to think that to no other people has God given the light of His truth more fully, and with less mixture of error. In this we are all concerned; we are all partakers. Partakers therefore we ought all to be, according to our power, in the attempt to spread that light farther. And, indeed, small as are now the beginnings of that work, and trying to faith, as it seems in our day, we know not what great things we are doing when we are laying the foundation of Christ's Kingdom in some heathen land. No missionary undertaking in heathen countries now could

be more unpromising than was the attempt to plant the Gospel here in England, and we see what this has come to. Shall we be less liberal, shall we have less faith in our cause, shall we be less able to look forward and foresee the final success, through many failures, and after long disappointments, than were those who in darker ages, and through greater difficulties, yet believed that they were not throwing away their pains in sending *us* the Gospel?

I leave this call of duty with you. I am sure that in helping it we are fulfilling our Lord's dearest wish. I believe that in it no labour, no gifts, no prayers, no self-denial, will in the end be wasted. I do not tell you that in our own day and generation we are to expect to see much fruit gathered in the heathen fields. It takes more time than that to convert nations, and overthrow a reign of darkness that has lasted for ages. But I do say that, in attacking this darkness, in sending men with nothing but their zeal and love, and the Gospel of Christ in their hands, to make their way among the heathen, we are doing exactly what was done when our own country was converted to Christ; we are doing what, in our case, has ended, after many days and many trials, in success. Therefore, I ask you to help in it; to help in it according to your means; to help in it according as your conscience tells you that you can spare something to be, as it were, a seed in the Gospel field. Here you will never see or hear of it more. It will go to swell the stream of gifts by which the missionary is sent abroad. But you know who will mark it; you know who can follow the least gift of the poorest, as it is lost to

human eyes in the multitude of larger gifts. You know who watched and remembered the widow's farthing, when the rich were casting in of their abundance into God's treasury. That eye is upon us still, to mark who might give and will not; to mark who gives, however little, according as each has received from Him ability to give. As you have been ministered to, so minister, as good stewards, each in his own place, of the gifts of God, so manifold, so endless, in their differences. As others who did not know you cared for you, so be generous, be large-hearted, in caring for those whom you know not.

It is worth remembering, on an occasion like this, that the first martyr who died for Christ in England gave his life for his neighbour as much as he gave it for the truth. His name was Alban. It was a time of persecution, and a Christian priest came flying from his pursuers, and took shelter in Alban's house. Alban was still a heathen, but he hid the Christian priest, out of pure kindness and pity for a hunted man. When, however, he observed the devotion of his guest,—how fervent it was, and how firm, and the consolation and joy he seemed to find in prayer,—Alban's heart was touched; and he listened to his teacher, and became a believer. Meanwhile the persecutors had found out where the Christian was hidden, and came to search Alban's house. Then Alban, putting on the dress of his teacher, delivered himself into their hands, as if he had been the fugitive; and in this way the man whom they had sought had time to escape. But Alban, because he refused to betray his guest, and say where he was gone, or to offer sacrifice to the idols he used to worship, was

scourged, and led forth to be put to death. The spot was a beautiful meadow, clothed with flowers, on a little rising ground—a fit theatre for a martyr's triumph; and there now stand a church and town which bear his name. There he was beheaded. And his example of noble generosity was followed on the spot. The soldier who was appointed to put him to death was so moved by his resignation and greatness of heart that he chose rather to suffer with him than to have the guilt of being his executioner. Let us remember this when we are tempted to be selfish. Let us remember that the first great deed of Christianity in England, the first instance in which it showed its power, was in making a man die to save a stranger's life, and draw on another to die with him. The first display of Christian grace was an act of loving others better than a man's self, and giving up for them all hope and reward in this world. It seems like a sign, a foreshadowing token, of what was to be the highest and noblest feature of English goodness and religion, the readiness to help others, to our cost; the readiness to sacrifice everything to a call of duty, of which we cannot see the end.

May we not fall short of that of which we have such noble examples.

## XV

## TO KNOW GOD IS LIFE ETERNAL

"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."—ST. JOHN xvii. 3.

THIS is the great day of the year which reminds us how much of the knowledge of God has been vouchsafed to us. By Trinity Sunday we are put in mind that we have been graciously allowed to know God as He is: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, in three Persons, yet one God. How highly favoured are we—how singularly chosen out of all our race, to be brought near to our Maker, and to know His name. Hundreds of thousands who are alive with us at this day do not know Him at all; we may know Him as fully as He can be known to man on earth. In former days He was known only dimly and darkly; all was not told about Him that was to be told; but for us the shadows have departed, and the veil is taken away. We may know Him as the angels know and praise Him. Christ has shown us plainly of the Father, and of the Holy Spirit, and of Himself. The mysteries that were hid from many generations, which many kings and righteous men desired to see, our eyes have seen, our ears have heard. They have been

revealed so as to be understood even by babes. How great indeed is our blessedness, if we understand it; how dreadful our blindness and our woe, if in the midst of light we still are blind,—if in the midst of God's love we still do not know Him. "For this," says our Master, "is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Not to know God is to be in eternal death: and *for us* not to know God is, with eternal life before us, with eternal life offered us, still to be by our own choosing in eternal death. He who knows God truly is not merely waiting and hoping for eternal life: he has begun already to enter on the inheritance, to live that heavenly life which, except by his own sin and falling away afterwards, can never end.

But what is it to know God? For in one sense there are few, among us at least, who have not some knowledge of God. When we speak of Christians who do not know God, we do not mean that they are like heathens and idolaters, who have never heard the blessed name. It would be better almost that *some* were as ignorant as heathens; it would be better for them that they had not the additional sin of knowing their Maker and Saviour, and yet rebelling against Him. But this kind of knowing God cannot be what Christ meant when He said that eternal life was to know God. To know God in this way must be indeed a very different thing from knowing Him as even sinners and hypocrites may know Him.

Let us see what it does *not* mean. To know God does not mean to have heard of Him, and been

taught about Him, just as we may have heard of some distant country, or some wonderful work, with which we have nothing to do, except to hear of it. Many people seem to think it enough to know God in this distant, outward, formal way. It never enters into their head that knowing Him by name, as it were, and knowing Him as we know some famous person who is far above us, whom we shall never see or speak to, can never make God be to them what the Bible represents Him; can never make them take comfort in Him, or rejoice in Him, or hope in Him. How can we take comfort or rejoice in one whom we know only by hearsay, and whose name is a mere word to us? How can we be saved or supported by one whom we never bring near to us, with whom we have nothing to do?

Nor does knowing God mean merely knowing a great deal of what the Bible tells us about Him. We may know much about a person without knowing the person himself. We may know much about a business without really and truly knowing the very thing itself, without having really entered into it with our mind and made ourselves masters of it, and got our hand into it. So we may know a great deal of the Bible, a great deal about God, without knowing that God whom the Bible reveals to us. We may take a great interest in searching out religious questions without knowing God; we may have many texts in remembrance, and not only remember them, but understand them, and yet not know God. We may be able to speak wisely and truly about God's nature, about His works and ways, about His redemption and His promises, and yet but very im-

perfectly know and understand God as He is in His doings toward the children of men.

Nor even does knowing God merely mean being under the influence of religious thoughts and impressions. We sometimes hear persons speak as if knowing God was only one of many ways of describing in Scripture language a religious frame of mind and course of life. Doubtless, the man who, ever so imperfectly, tries in earnest to serve God,—the merest babe in Christ,—does know more of God really than the man who is most learned in the Scriptures, but whose heart is not turned to God. But at the same time the knowledge of God as Jesus Christ spoke of it is a great thing. It must not be supposed that every one has it whose conscience is really pricked for his sins; nor even every one who has begun in earnest to think of eternal things, and heartily and seriously to seek to please God, and to gain the forgiveness and peace and strength of the Gospel. Such a man, if his faith is real and his heart sound, is in the way to know God. But we must not speak as if turning to God was at once the same as knowing God,—as if in the first days or the first years of a repentant sinner's new life he was to expect or to think that he had come at one step to what the Bible means by knowing God.

What then does knowing God mean? It means, not knowing Him by name, not knowing about Him, not knowing Him as a stranger and foreigner, whose speech and ways we have not been accustomed to; but knowing Him in the sense in which we know a father, or mother, or friend, whom we love and value above every one else; whose ways and thoughts we

are thoroughly acquainted with; and who, we feel, knows us thoroughly, feels with us, cares for us, and longs for our being happy. This is really knowing; and this is a thing not to be gained in a day, even among men. We may have a great deal to do with a person, and yet feel that we do not know him. We may like a person very much, and have much in common with him, yet feel that this is different from what we call knowing him intimately. We may be very good friends, and walk together pleasantly and profitably, and yet feel that there is very much of his heart which we have never come near,—that there are many of his thoughts which we do not understand,—that there are many of his ways which we cannot see the reason of. It is when we *do* feel that we enter into his wishes and thoughts, that our heart goes with his heart, that we feel the same way and follow the same things and act by the same rules,—then it is that we begin to say and to feel that we know a person.

And knowing God means nothing less than this kind of knowing: knowing not by the hearing of the ear, but by the heart and mind and soul; knowing not by name or outward words, but by real experience, by having to do with Him in the course of life, in sorrow and in joy, in trouble and in success. Doubtless, we cannot know Almighty God as we know our fellow-men. We cannot understand the thoughts and ways of the wonderful Lord, who fills heaven and earth, who is without beginning and without end, whom no man hath seen or can see, as we can those of our brethren whose faces we have seen and whose voices we can hear. But what says the great God of Hosts? "Thus saith the high and

lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." And what says our Master also? "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." He is in heaven and we on earth, yet we may hope to know Him. He is perfect and holy and we are blind and weak and sinful; but though we cannot know Him perfectly, yet we may know Him, though imperfectly, and understand some part of His goodness, and wisdom and love; and even the archangels cannot understand it all.

To know God is eternal life; for, indeed, it is to live continually in His presence, to have Him for the witness and companion of our daily life. And what else is eternal life than a life with God, a life led for ever in the presence of God, and as God desires? To begin to live so on earth is to begin to do here what we shall continue to do in glory in the world to come. Here we do it with pain and difficulty, with many mistakes and continual sins, among enemies and temptations; and there enemies and temptations will be gone for ever, and peace and holiness and glory will have come in the place of sin and pain. But the life will be the same,—only the traveller will have reached his home,—the workman will have done his work,—the soldier will have won his rest.

Compare the two lives: the life of him who does not know God, and the life of him who does, and

you will see that eternal life has indeed begun to the man who really knows God—knows Him in his walks and ways, about his path and about his bed. To him who knows not God and His ways this world may be very well as long as he is young and in prosperity, and everything goes well with him. But when does the world go entirely right with any man, even the young and the happy? Do not most days bring their trouble and vexation—something that goes wrong and cross? And what is there then for the man who knows not God but to feel the bitterness without anything to sweeten it, and to give himself up to his sorrow and disappointment?

And what, when real heavy grief and difficulty come? When he is sick, he must bear the whole weight of it, without anything to brighten and soothe him, for man cannot share it with him, and the comfort and hope of God are strange and unknown to him. If heavy afflictions come on him, he can only see in them unmixed misery and hopeless anguish, for he has not been accustomed to God's ways, and understands nothing of how God mingles mercy even with judgment, and how He chastises those whom He loves for their good. If he is in great straits, and cannot see his way, he is brought at once to despair, for he knows not that God is a light in the darkness, and that, to those who trust His guidance, the time which seems most hopeless on earth is the time when the seed of comfort and light are sown for future years. When earthly things fail with him, when man fails to help and support him, he has nothing beyond and above the earth to give a stronger and more enduring consolation. He knows not God; he knows not God's

ways of dealing with those He loves. He sees all round him nothing but plagues and torments, which he is not strong enough to get rid of and drive away. He sees all around, in heaven and earth, no one to pity him, no one to take his part, no one who can feel for his sorrows, no one to guide his steps, no one to bring him right if he has gone astray, no one to tell him that his sins are forgiven, no one to make up to him for all that he has lost. The name of God gives him no hope, for it is merely a name to him. He has lived without God, in his real, actual life; he has not sought to understand and know God; and when none but God can minister relief and open the doors of hope, the doors of hope remain closed, and "vanity of vanities" is all that remains to him of life.

How different to be able to spend our days here knowing God: knowing Him as our Father, our Guide, our Friend; knowing His way of dealing with those He loves; understanding His deep and abounding tenderness as it works, through outward troubles; seeing His hand and love in all things, and able to commit our way to Him, sure that in the best and most blessed manner He will bring it to pass; feeling that He is with us, and that all things work for good to them that love Him; feeling that, as a dear friend watches us in his kindness, so His eye is ever over us, and He sees into our very heart; sure that, as earthly things depart, heavenly things will be coming nearer, and, that whatever comes on us here, nothing can take Him and His love away from us.

Those who thus know God have the thought of Him with them wherever they are; just as we think continually of our friends whom we have long

known and tried and found faithful. Daily they learn, more and more, His mind and will. Daily they become more and more near to Him whom they have taken for their hope and reward. Daily their thoughts become more like God's thoughts; they judge of things in the world as God judges of them; they measure good and evil, blessings and losses, as He measures them; they get to be one in feeling with Him,—able to take what He sends, and to be without those things which He sees not good to send. And daily, more and more, in what they do they think of what He would approve and like; their first thought is not of what they would like themselves, but of what would please Him and help forward what He desires. Thus more and more, as life goes on, they live with Him, not by talking or profession, but in the real inward feelings and wishes and thoughts of their hearts; and by watching Him, thinking of Him, trying to copy Him, they become more and more like Him, they are "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

And then how different are earthly troubles to them. In pain and anguish they know that the smart is but for a while, and that it is not sent by chance and for no good; for they know *God*, and they know His way of sending pain. When they are at their wits' end, and see no help anywhere, they still are not cast down; they know who is secretly round about them, for they know God, and that it is His way so to try His children's trust and affection. And when it is all over with them here, and the silent and sure step of death is heard at the door, they know that, nevertheless, all things have *not* an

end with them; they know that the best part of their portion and hope is yet to come,—yea, is at the very doors with death itself. For why? They know God; they know in whom they have believed; they know Him who is Immortal, and strong above death and hell; they know Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. Is not this, even here, eternal life, to know Thee, "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent"?

Oh how blessed above all are those who have thus learnt to know Him. Pray and strive for it; for it is not a blessing which comes by wishing for it, by working ourselves up to strong feeling and heated thought. It comes by degrees. It comes as the wind comes—we know not whence. For, indeed, it is the reward, not of the beginner in religion, but of the tried and proved servant of God. It is the reward of faithfulness and obedience. It can be hoped for in no other way than from the earnest and consistent endeavour to please God, to serve and honour Him,—not here and there, not now and then, but throughout the whole course of life. Thus by experience shall we come to know God; thus shall we find what we read about Him in the Bible made good to our own hearts, to the joys and troubles of our own lives. Let us live as if we desired to know God. Let us earnestly strive, in thought and deed, to keep His commandments; and surely we shall be learning in very truth to know Him. For so is Christ's promise, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father . . and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

## XVI

## THE DANGER OF THE WORLD

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—1 ST. JOHN ii. 15.

WE hear a great deal said in Holy Scripture about the world, the evil of the world, the love of the world; and we ought to take care that we understand rightly what is meant by these words. I do not know anything of greater consequence towards making our religion a solid and real thing than knowing what we mean, and having the right meaning, when we use common, familiar, religious words. And I do not know any habit that we are more apt to fall into than using them without thinking of what they mean. We hear them so often that we come to think that of course we understand them. Faith and grace, and sin and repentance, and forgiveness and salvation, and a number of words of the same kind, are for ever coming up when we read the Bible or hear sermons; and, I am afraid, we go on hearing them again and again, without ever asking ourselves whether we do more than hear these words with our ears; whether in our minds they stand for something which is more than a mere common sound, and of which we take in the meaning. And

so we go on, hearing without profit, because we never ask ourselves whether we really know what is meant by these words, which seem so plain and easy only because we hear them so often.

Such a word is that which is so common in all religious books and discourses — the world. The world is spoken of as an enemy, a temptation, a danger. The love of this world is what we are continually warned against. Worldliness is one of the worst signs against a man—one of the sins which, in words at least, we all acknowledge to be inconsistent with true religion. Everybody can talk against worldliness. Every one allows and takes for granted that it is wrong to love the world. Ought we not then to know as clearly as we can what is meant by the world?

There can be no doubt or mistake that this is the true and right way of speaking. When in our baptism we renounce the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same; when in our Catechism we are taught to look on the world as one of the three great enemies of our souls; when in the Collect we pray to God to give us grace to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil,—we are but speaking as the Bible has taught us, we are but calling the world our enemy, because the Bible has taught us that it is so. "Know ye not," says St. James, "that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "Love not the world," St. John says, "neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "The whole world," he says in another place, "lieth in

wickedness;" and the great victory of faith,—that in which it is like to the victory of Jesus Christ Himself,—is that it "overcomes the world." And our Lord Himself speaks in the same way about the world. Those who are not His are the children of this world. His and our great spiritual enemy, the devil, is called by Him the "prince of this world." Christ's kingdom is "not of this world." They who are His are "hated by the world"; they are said to be "not of this world, even as He is not of this world." The world, in all these passages—and these are but some out of many like them—stands for something confessedly evil, confessedly contrary to Christ's Gospel, confessedly inconsistent with His service, and fatal to men's souls.

What is meant by the world here? What is this terrible world which rises up in the pages of Scripture as the mighty and dangerous foe of Christ and of His kingdom? What is that ensnaring and corrupting world to which it is as much as their souls are worth, that Christians be not "conformed"? What is this "present evil world" out of which their hope is "to be delivered"?

I suppose, if we were asked what was meant by the expression,—if we were asked to explain, in other words, what it stands for,—our first answer would be something of this kind: that the world means all this present state of things which we see, with all the fine and pleasant and profitable things which men are so fond of, and with all the people who are fond of them and follow them. This present state of things, this present life, and what belongs to it—that is the natural answer of most to the question what is meant in the Catechism, or in

these passages of the Bible, by *the world.* Must we then regard this present state of things, and all that belongs to it, with the feelings which the Bible tells us Christians ought to have towards the world? Well then, but what a life are we all leading! If *the world* means simply this present state of things, and if worldliness means simply the love of what belongs to this present state of things, what are we, one and all of us, doing? We have families and family ties, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and children. Our hearts are full of them; we love them, and our hearts are bound up with their lives and happiness; and do not family ties and interests belong to this present state of things? We have our business and work, one after this manner, another after that; work which takes up our time and thoughts, and gives us enough to do to get through it, whether it be with our hands or with our brains, whether it be our farm, or our day's labour, or our merchandise, or our learning, or our teaching. Our days are given to it, we think it right to be earnest and thorough in it, and if we are doing it as we ought, we are finding great and real pleasure in doing it to the very best of our power. And do not all the businesses and works of man, works of his hand or of his mind, every pursuit and calling in which he is employed, do not they all belong to this present state of things? We have many pleasures and enjoyments; we say, when we speak of them religiously, that God has graciously been abundant in His gifts to us; we enjoy the beauty and the bounty of His creation, the beauty and the glory of the sun and the light, of the

trees and fields, of the sea and the mountains, of the flowers of the spring and the richness of the summer, of the ripeness and the golden harvests of the autumn. We rejoice in the great and wonderful inventions of man's skill and power; we find delight in reading the beautiful and marvellous things and thoughts which men with greater gifts than their brethren have preserved and handed down to us in their books. But all these, — the beautiful story, the grand history, the glorious poetry,—what are they but of this present state of things? Yet these are things among which our life is spent. In these is our chief employment, our chief pleasure. As long as we are here we are full of them. Well then, are all these simply part of that world which lieth in wickedness? of that world which we have renounced? of that world which whoso loveth, must of necessity be the enemy of God? These things, I say, belong only to this present state of things; are they, therefore, necessarily of this world? is the love of them love of the world and worldliness?

If so, I do not see what there is for us but simply to go out of the world, and have no more to do with what men in general engage in. It is quite certain that what we are all busy about is for the most part of this present state only; that it is but for a time, that it must vanish and pass away, as we are told in Holy Scripture that the world does, and the lust thereof. And if the world means all that belongs to this present state, and if all love and care for what belongs to this present state is worldliness, it would seem to be impossible to live as most men have to live,—to follow our callings, to love our

families, to rejoice in the pleasures which are the portion of this life, and also to attend to the words of the Bible, and to renounce the world and worldliness as we promised in our baptism.

But is it not much more likely that we have not taken the trouble to think and understand what the Bible means by *the world*; that we have used the words at random, because we have heard them in the mouths of others, and perhaps thought it a fine thing to talk against the world, and perhaps condemn our neighbours as worldly? If what the Bible means by worldly means everything which belongs to this present state, which of us does not love the world, which of us is not a worldling and servant of mammon? But that cannot be the right meaning. What it means we will try to see presently. But in the meantime let us consider what comes of using such a word as this without thinking of what it really means. Either people put wrong meanings to it, or they come to think that it has no meaning at all. Either they torment themselves with scruples and difficulties about what may be worldly, or they get into harsh and uncharitable ways of denouncing as the world or worldly some particular things against which they have a prejudice, or which are done by people they do not like, or which are not to their taste; without thinking whether what they do, and allow themselves in, is not just as much a matter belonging to the present state of things. Or else, looking at the inconsistencies of those who talk much against the world and worldliness, and seeing clearly that God did mean men to be busy with the things of this present state, and to make them

glad with the blessings and gifts of His good creatures here, they persuade themselves that there is no meaning at all in what is said of the evil and danger of the world, and no such sin really as what is called worldliness. They flatter themselves that they need not be on their guard against what, perhaps, is their most deadly peril; they throw off from their souls and consciences all that religion urges to awaken and alarm them; and its sternest and most awful lessons fall dead on their ears and hearts.

What, then, does the Bible mean when it condemns and warns us against the world? Not simply the things of this present state, or the love and care for them: for our families, which God bids us love and provide for, our business, in which He bids us to be diligent and earnest, the temporal gifts and enjoyments which He bids us rejoice in and give thanks for,—these are all of this present state, and of that only. And if they were "the world" against the love of which He warns us, He would be giving us with one hand what, with the other, He was beckoning us to refuse. The world which the Bible warns us against is not simply this present state of things, but this present state of things *set against and preferred to the world to come, and eternity.* If there were no heaven and no hereafter, we could have nothing to think of but this present state. But there is a hereafter, there is a heaven to be gained or lost; and this being so, this present state, whatever be its goodness or desirableness, must of course be of very trifling moment when it is compared or weighed against that which is to come. So if we choose this present life rather than life eternal, we choose

what Holy Scripture calls *this world.* If we are so full of the things which belong to this present state, however in themselves lawful and innocent and right, that we forget that other world, then our hearts are full of what Holy Scripture calls the *cares of this world.* If we, who are Christians, and have the promise of an everlasting inheritance, live like heathen, who know nothing of any promise of everlasting life, we are living a worldly life, a life conformed to this world. If we love anything of this present state so much as to drive out of our hearts the love of our Father and God, and the wish to be with Him, and to be like Him, for ever, we have that love of the world which the Bible declares is enmity with God. He Himself bids us love our neighbours, love our friends, love father and mother, wife and children; but if even *these* we love more than Him, we choose our portion with this world, and are not worthy of Him and His kingdom.

This, I say, is what the Bible means by the world, by the love of this world, by worldliness,—not simply this present state, in which we must have our dealings, our interests, our deepest human love and affection; but this present state whenever, and under whatever circumstances, it is the one only thought and love of our hearts; whenever it throws the other, the eternal state, into the shade, shuts it out and makes us forget it, and live as if it were not to be; whenever we sacrifice the hope of that future blessedness, or the service of the God who is out of sight, to anything whatever, hope or fear, pleasure or advantage, care or love, that is of the present; whenever we shrink from denying ourselves

and our wishes now, in order that God may not account us unworthy of His presence hereafter. In one word, the present state of things becomes "this world" in its bad sense to us, with all its dangers and evils, whenever this present state becomes all in all to us, and whenever we use this world without remembering that it is God's world.

It is not in the things themselves that we are to look for that "evil world," which is one of our three great enemies, and which, with the devil and the lusts of the flesh, we renounced in baptism; not in the things themselves, but in our way of using them, our way of looking at them, our way of loving and following them. They are in themselves what God has made good, and given to us for this space of our mortal life; they are for our benefit, our comfort and admiration; we cannot do without them. But the moment that we lift them up to that exclusive possession of our hearts which something better and greater than they are ought to have, we make this the "evil world" to us. The moment we put them in the place of God, and make them the reason for not obeying and serving Him as we ought, we turn them into that fatal and poisonous world, to be bound to which is to lose our souls. If we find that, in fact, they keep us from thinking of eternal things, we may be sure that we are in danger from the world; not because they are bad in themselves, but because our hearts are wrong. It is the forgetfulness of God's love and goodness and holiness, the dislike to obey His laws, the turning away of the soul from the remembrance of Him,—it is the fault and sin in man himself, which finds snares where God placed

blessings, and which fills so widely human society with the sin of worldliness, that the Apostle speaks of the whole world lying in wickedness.

Now here is a meaning of "the world" and "the love of the world" which does not drive us from the employments of this life, or shut us out from its blessings; but which certainly will not let any one say that *worldliness* is one of those empty words of which we cannot find the clear reality and substance in actual life. For if worldliness is not simply the love of this life, but the love of this life better than of the other,—the sacrificing the hopes of the other to the good of this,—then surely most people's consciences must know what it means. Most people must remember times when what was only of this world came into opposition with something that belonged to the other. Alas! and most people must remember times when the things of this life prevailed over and cast out all thought and care of the other. May there not be some who can hardly remember any time when, this life and the other being weighed against each other, the hopes of the other life made them give up what they liked or wished for now?

But, at any rate, this any one can understand—that there is such a thing, over and above feeling interest and affection for the things of this present state, as loving them more than the will of God, more than the duty of a Christian, more than the prospect of eternal life. If there is, then, that which we prefer to God's will and promise, is what the Bible warns us against as *the world*,—that love which will not let us obey God, which will not give

way when it clashes and crosses with what He says is good and right, is *worldliness.*

If any one *so* love the world, surely, as St. John says, "the love of the Father is not in him." If he *so* love this present state of things that he deliberately shuts his eyes to that gracious and glorious promise of a better, which the Father, in His love to us, has revealed, the love of the Father cannot be in him. If he is so satisfied with this life that he deliberately chooses to have his portion here, it is no hard thing to say that there is enmity between him and his God. If he deliberately makes his religion give way to his worldly interests or earthly affections, he cannot be excused because worldly interests and earthly affections are not sinful in themselves; he cannot thus escape the charge of serving mammon more than Christ, of being a "lover of pleasure more than a lover of God." And what a bargain is this love of the world! "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" What profit indeed?

This world, this present state of things, has its excellencies, its marvellous blessings, its marvellous perfections, its unspeakably gracious gifts. Great are they, greatly to be prized, greatly to be given thanks for. Let no one speak scornfully of them, lest he be found to speak foolishly and unthankfully. Let no one say that they are not meant for the use and profit and exercise of man; for they are the gifts of our Father's love and providence for His creatures. But at the best, what are they? They do not last; they cannot be kept. And we,—*we*, undying and immortal spirits,—we last beyond them. We live on to find them gone; we shall be living on when they

have been long forgotten. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Even so; whether we use the world rightly or abuse it, in either case it passes away. The gifts of God, which we have sanctified by thanksgiving, and so turned them into blessings, and those which we have set up as idols against the Giver, and so turned into curses, alike pass away; and leave us, the spirit and living soul which even death does not kill,—leave us, who cannot pass away into nothingness as they do,—leave us to receive the fruit and reward of our use of them. And, then, with this certainty before our eyes, to prefer *them* to God!

Oh, what reason to be watchful lest in our employment and use of the things of this present time we forget all about that time which is soon to come. We have no business to decline the things of this present time. We have no business to fasten the name of worldliness on a busy and occupied life, or on the full and keen enjoyment of the countless blessings which God showers on us. It is part of our trial to serve and remember God in the round and bustle of common workday life. But, after all, it is but a short interest that we have in it all. "This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." Can we hear without being moved these solemn words? Can we resist being moved by them: and shall we not lay them to heart?

## XVII

# THE NEVER-FAILING PROVIDENCE OF GOD

"In thee, O Lord, have I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion."—PSALM xxxi. 1.

THERE are times in our lives when at the thought of all that we have to do, and of all that we have to fear, our hearts sink within us. Our duties are great and often difficult, and they are unceasing. There is no end of them. Doing them to-day does not relieve us from the necessity of having to meet new ones to-morrow. And so much hangs on these duties. There is mercy, there is considerate allowance, there is forgiveness; but yet so much hangs on these duties. And how can we be sure of always answering as we were meant to answer the call of God,—of fulfilling, as He requires of us, His will?

And our dangers, too, are great. We see in the Bible, we see in all experience, how common it is to fail, to be led from the right way into the wrong; how much there is in the world of secret, hidden mischief; how the path of human life lies among snares and pitfalls. We know that we must be tried; we know that we must be tempted. Things will happen which will put us to the proof, which will

show what we are and what is in our hearts. And we know that we are weak, and have made mistakes; that we have before now been tried and found wanting. And who can tell what is waiting for us in the dark unknown future before us? Who knows what we may have to suffer; who knows what we may have to lose; who knows what enemies are lying in wait for us in the dark time to come—enemies terrible, unseen, and unknown, of those in the spiritual world which war against the soul? What may not be our appointed lot of trouble? What strange changes of our fortune may we not see on our passage to the grave? What may we not have one day to choose between?

We must feel that we are born into an awful world,—awful in what it shows us and in what it hides; awful in its ever new beauty and ever new opening glories; awful in its undiscovered secrets, and its darkness which no eye or mind can pierce through. It spreads all round us and folds us round, and we feel, as it were, lost in it. We are like children lost on a wide common on a dark night. Where we are going, what may befall us, is hidden from us. What has happened to others, why should it not happen to us? Where can we feel our guide? Who can feel sure that he will be guided safely; that help will come at the moment when it will be of use; that, when we are least thinking of it, the evil day may not come?

These things, I say, will come into our thoughts sometimes. They do not come, perhaps, into the thoughts of the brave, or into the thoughts of the dull and insensible, who never look forward; but

all of us are not insensible, and all of us are not brave.

When these thoughts oppress us we are told, and rightly told, to put them away from us. They are weak thoughts, vain thoughts, faithless thoughts, useless thoughts; and, taken by themselves as they come upon us when they distress us, they are false thoughts. For besides that they cannot do anything to strengthen and defend us,—besides that all they can do is to disturb and discourage us,—besides that all dwelling on what we can know nothing of and cannot help is one of those wrong things which we *ought* to, and which we really have *the power* to drive out of our minds,—at the outside, the thoughts themselves are but *half true.*

For if it is true that our duties are great, it is true also that in their own due time and season they will not be greater than we may hope to have strength to do. If it is true that our dangers are great and manifold, it is also true that our safeguards and means of escape are as many and as various, and that we may wisely and reasonably trust them. If experience shows many failures, it shows too as many triumphs. So that to think only of what is against us is to think of what is only half the truth. And half the truth becomes falsehood when we think of it as if it were the whole truth.

But in our days of weakness and trouble these fears and anxieties will not always go because we bid them. They will not always give way to what, in calmer and cooler moments, we see to be truth and reason and good sense. And even if we do keep them down, they do not lose their power to disquiet

and sadden; their shadow falls across our path, and we cower and shrink before the unknown future and its unsearchable darkness, which looks so threatening because no one can tell what it may hide and have in store. To-day, perhaps, we can face it boldly. To-morrow the awful "*may-be's*" of the time to come open out one after another with oppressive clearness, and rise up before us, challenging us to say that they are impossible. We have no covenant with pain or death; we are not assured against what has visited other men. Who knows what news to-morrow may bring us? Who knows what we may be called to go through before the month is past? Who knows what accident may happen to us? Who can say that, turning any corner, we may not meet our fate?

Is there nothing but the calm, deliberate debate of unexcited reason, arguing about what is likely and what is sensible and prudent, to meet this pressure? Is there nothing else to take off the burden on the heart and spirit? Is there no present and immediate remedy against fears which are so trying just because they are so dim and vague? Is there any thought which can be set against these thoughts, strong enough to overpower them,—weighty enough to be put in the balance against them,—true enough to be matched against what is true in them,—real enough to be relied on, for the heart of man to lean on,—cheering enough to nerve our spirits to face the chances of our lot, and to quicken our fainthearted-ness into life and hope?

There is such a thought. There is a thought, resting on which, and calling it up in our souls in its

simple, plain, living truth, we can endure, and feel ourselves comforted and at peace, when a too vivid sense of the risks and jeopardy of man's life threatens to crush us. It is the thought that God guides us; that we are not walking and wandering unwatched, uncared for,—helpless among enemies, blindly stumbling along a path in which no one directs our steps; but that all round us, now and to-morrow, and each hour until the end, are the watchful eyes of God, are the mighty hands of God. From the range of those eyes we can never stray; from out of those hands we can never fall. Infinite wisdom is in that foresight that never fails; infinite love and goodness in that power which has no master. Are we able to trust that wisdom? Are we willing to submit ourselves to that will? Then we are within a shelter where we can take no harm. Then, come what may, we are safe.

This is the belief which is the foundation of the book of Psalms. No men ever in this world felt this truth so deeply and so unceasingly,—felt it as the living and ever-present principle of each word and thought,—as the men whose hearts the Spirit of God taught to write the Psalms. And it was to stamp this truth upon all the ages and degrees and changes of religious faith, to keep it clear and fresh and strong, however men might otherwise differ from one another,—rich from poor, learned from unlearned, Greek from Jew, men of this day from the men of hundreds of years ago,—it was to keep up among them all this great truth, that in the hands of God man may rest safe,—that the Psalms were gathered into one book, and sung as the natural and familiar

expression of faith and trust, from generation to generation, from church to church, and have been adopted as household words of prayer.

This thought, this truth, that God guides those who trust Him, and never guides them wrong, is the mark, the distinguishing doctrine, the keynote, of the book of Psalms. Just as we mark in Isaiah, as that which is especially his own, his prophecies of Messiah and of the Gospel redemption; just as we say that the ruling and leading thought in St. Paul's epistles is the doctrine of grace, and in St. John's the repetition of his Master's call to love,—so in the Psalms the leading and ruling thought, which makes them different from all other books, is the belief in God's unfailing guardianship. It is summed up in that verse which I have read as the text, and which, in a somewhat different shape, ends our great Christian hymn of *Te Deum*, "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded."

It is the verse, of all others, which might be taken by itself to express the spirit of all the Psalms. In prayer, in assertion, in prophecy and promise—changed, it may be, in turn of language or choice of words,—nay, even in complaint, in expostulation, in misgiving and fear, in appeals in which are interwoven an agonised despair,—this expression of faith appears again and again, running like a golden thread, and mixing with colours dark and light throughout the Psalms. "In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion." "They put their trust in Thee, and were not confounded." "Be strong, and He shall establish your heart, all ye that put your trust in the Lord." "My God, my God, look upon me;

why hast Thou forsaken me? . . . Our fathers hoped in Thee; they trusted in Thee, and Thou didst deliver them." The verse, indeed, is one which has played its sad, yet high and comforting part in many a sorrowful history. Except, perhaps, that other verse in the thirty-first Psalm, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit," no other verse of the Psalms probably has been so often the last words on the lips of dying men. The assertion of a hope, which the close of all earthly hopes cannot shake, it has offered itself as a stay to the spirits of men to whom hope was over here.

To men of very different times and different feelings; to men dying in their strength by violence, or worn out by long years of toil; to the missionary on his deathbed in a strange land; to the martyrs of the rival creeds of Christendom; to the victims of deadly political strife, at the stake, on the scaffold, and at the block,—these words have come back to the remembrance of men who had but one gasp between them and death; and in them they have said their last hope and prayer, each in his own language: "*In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in æternum.*" "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded."

And what to them was the last comfort in dying is the only sure stay and support to us in living. They died feeling that, in spite of dying, they were still in the hands of God. If we would, without distress and weakness, face our condition, we must open our hearts to the belief that, living, we are also in the hands of God; that whatever we may live to see or to meet, we are *never* out of the hands of God,

never out of the reach of His power to save and to restore. We cannot know our fate. We cannot foresee what may befall us. We cannot guess what we may be called upon to go through. We know that we are weak, and that deep and wide on all sides of us are the "overflowings of ungodliness," the forces of evil, the deceits of sin. We know not in what difficult position we may be placed, and with what weight of responsibility on our head. We know not what God may choose to take from us; what light in our sky He may darken or put out; what power in our souls He may cloud over or withdraw. We know not what a day may bring forth. But what we do know is, that in it all and with it all there comes to those who put their trust in God a Hand which wisely and strongly orders all things; there comes the Providence which beholds all things from end to end; there is present the same protection of that everlasting Goodness which has never failed those that hope in Him—which is able, through all appearances of loss and overthrow and perishing, to save to the uttermost what is committed to His charge.

Let us then turn to those great truths of God's Guardianship and Providence on which our souls were meant to rest and stay themselves, and be at peace. Let us make them our familiar thoughts, as they were to those who, in their trials, their dangers, their fears, their anguish, rose out of them into Psalms of hope and trust and sure success. So shall we be ready for what may come upon us. So may we look forward without terror. So may we bear the burden when it comes without losing patience. Let

us have that trust in God in our hearts; so will it spring up in old, well-remembered words and texts, which will come into fresh light and meaning to us in our hour of necessity.

Let us now, in our day of peace and calm, learn to commend into the Hands of God our spirit, soul, and body, which He has created, redeemed, regenerated; and with it our whole course of life, and all who are ours, and all that belongs to us. Let us commend it all,—our life, and all its changes and issues,—to Him, to whose Wisdom and Love and Truth we may surely leave them. Let us beseech Him now, in our time of health and strength, to be with us at the end; that when the close is to be, He would "direct it in peace, without sin, without shame, and, if it please Him, without pain, gathering us together with His Elect when He wills and as He wills." So may we go forward in hope and peace, committing all our ways to Him; casting our burden on the Lord, who will not suffer the righteous to fall for ever; casting all our anxieties upon Him, for He careth and taketh thought about us. Then the bright days of calm and sunshine will not be treacherous, for they are the rest of God, and God gives it to us, and guards it round. "The hills stand about Jerusalem; even so standeth the Lord round about His people, from this time forth for evermore." Then need we not fear in the days of darkness, for in them too God is there. "Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy defence on thy right hand; so that the sun shall not burn thee by day, neither the moon by night." Then, when

one deep calleth to another; when trouble is heavy on us, and all its waves and storms have gone over us; when we hear the voices whispering, "Where is now thy God?"—we shall know how to fall back on the thoughts with which the Psalmist once and again cheered on his heart to hope: "Why art thou so vexed, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God, for I will yet give Him thanks, which is the help of my countenance, and my God." So let us look forward. "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded." In all time of our wealth and peace let us learn to say this with truth and earnestness. Then, in all time of our tribulation, will it become our fit and natural appeal. Then, at the hour of death, it will rise to our heart and lips,—a prayer which is the warrant and prophecy of its own fulfilment: "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded." "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; I *shall not* be confounded."

## XVIII

## TRUST IN THE LORD

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil."—PROVERBS iii. 5-7.

SPEAKING broadly and generally, there are two ways in which people pass through life. They pass through it *remembering* God, or they pass through it *forgetting* Him. They go through it with Him in their minds, though they cannot see Him; or they go through it as if they had nothing to do with Him. They live as if this world were all they had to think about, or they remember that another life is coming, though they know they have to die in this world. And, of course, in what they do, this great difference shows itself. If people have not God and eternity in their thoughts, how is it possible that they should do anything as if they *had*? how can they try to please God, whom they never think of? and how can they give themselves any trouble to be prepared for eternity, when eternity is nothing but a mere word and sound to them, meaning nothing? But if they do really have the greatness and mercy and judgment of God continually in their minds, they must either be openly rebelling

against the light, or else they cannot help shaping their lives by the awful truths they believe, and living as those who must soon pass away from here to meet the Judge and Saviour of quick and dead. Either they are "wise in their own eyes"—that is, they trust themselves and the present world for everything they wish and work for, and feel no want of God, nor care for what He promises—or they "acknowledge Him in all their ways"; they think of His eye, His will, His hand, to uphold or cast down, to guide or to chastise, in all that they undertake through their life. Either they "lean to their own understanding"; they are satisfied with what they see and have learnt about the ways and wisdom and good things of this present world, and will not listen even to God, when He tells them a different story about what men think so much of here; or they trust in the Lord with all their heart, knowing that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," and that it would profit a man nothing if he were to "gain the whole world and lose his own soul."

And so these two ways of going through life come back to the old difference, which we have heard of so often; one is walking by sight, the other is walking by faith. One is caring only for what we can see now; the other is caring for the things which we cannot see, but which we know are true, and which we shall one day see with our eyes as surely as we see things of this world now.

These are the two ways in which all men are now going through their days. God is out of sight to us all: the difference is that to some He is out

of mind; by others He is really and truly constantly thought of. The openly wicked, the sinners who are not afraid to transgress with a high hand, forget God—that we all see; but I wish it was only they. God is out of mind to many more besides them; to many who are not lawless and rebellious, who are quiet and sober, industrious and respectable, who get on in the world because they are so well behaved, and hurt no one, and have such an excellent character, but who, alas! think of this world only, and of nothing above it, nothing beyond it. With them, too, God is really out of mind because He is out of sight.

It is not, indeed, for man to say, except where persons openly break God's laws, *who* is walking in one way and *who* in the other,—who is secretly remembering God and who is forgetting Him. Men are too much mixed up for that. God has given us no command and no liberty to judge one another, where only He can tell how the heart is thinking; for is there any one who tries to remember God, and to trust in Him, but knows how often he forgets God, and trusts to his own conceit and self-wisdom instead? Man cannot make the division, except where outward actions make it plainly; and even then they leave it uncertain.

We are all mixed up together for the present: those who are passing through the world looking to God, and leaning on His arm; and those who have no help but what their own strength gives them, and no hope beyond this world. We are all mixed up together,—nay, the two ways are mixed up very often in ourselves; we seem to pass from one to the

other, from forgetting God to remembering Him, from trusting Him to trusting only this world; we have Him in mind one hour—we lean unto our own understanding the next. Yet in spite of all this, there are but the two ways that I spoke of in which we can pass our days; there is no mixing up of them in the eyes of God, who sees all clearly, however much to human judgment both seem sometimes to be joined, and there seems to be a going backward and forward from one to the other. God, who cannot mistake, or be perplexed and deceived by what perplexes and deceives us, sees most surely that, *on the whole*, we have each one of us chosen either the one way or the other; on the whole, in spite of changes and inconsistencies, in spite of the better mind which comes at times to some, in spite of the mistakes and infirmities of others, we are all of us, on the whole, walking through our earthly pilgrimage by ourselves, or with Him for our help; providing only for this life, or providing for the next; trusting in the Lord with all our heart, and acknowledging Him in all our ways, and finding Him there directing our paths, or else leaning on our own understanding, and in all our doings wise in our own eyes, and therefore not fearing the Lord, not really departing from evil.

Now, to which is our ordinary course of life most like? Do not let us deceive ourselves. Do not let us think that, because we often speak of God's hand in our concerns, we are therefore really thinking of His presence, and acknowledging Him in our ways. Many persons speak of what it has pleased the Lord to do to them, without at all feeling in

their hearts that *it is* the Lord; they do it because they have heard others do it, or have been accustomed to use the words, or think it right in speaking to others to speak so. But it does not follow that they acknowledge Him in all their doings through the day, in small matters as well as great, because when they are moved by sorrow or gladness they feel the words come up to their lips. We ought to look close into our hearts and secret ways if we would not be deceived; if we really wish to know, what is of such consequence to us, whether we are trusting to Almighty God's wisdom and strength to help and guide us through our day's walk, or whether we are leaning to our own poor weak understanding to guide our steps.

If you really want to know this better, you must go to some surer proofs than words and ways of speaking. One sure proof is in your private prayers. It is impossible that any one can really be acknowledging God,—can be thinking of anything but worldly things,—who does not pray by himself in secret, and pray every day regularly. Therefore, if any one knows that he does not take care to say his private prayers to God daily, there is a proof and warning to him at once that he is not acknowledging God,—that he is living without God in the world. He may be as industrious and quiet and respectable and kind-hearted as possible, but he is living without religion, as one who has only this life to pass through, and has no everlasting state waiting for him after he is dead. Private, secret prayer, offered to God daily and regularly, is the one great proof whether we believe and trust in God; if this

proof is not there, then it is certain that, whatever we may say or do, we do not in our hearts believe God, or fear Him.

But even if we do pray thus in secret, this is not enough. *How* do we pray? Do we make a reality of our prayers by giving our mind to them, and keeping our thoughts from wandering,—by earnestly begging God to be merciful to us, and to take care of us, in soul and body, both here and for eternity? Or do we pray only because we should feel uncomfortable if we had not said our prayers, but yet without really feeling that we need what we pray for?

This matter of private secret prayer, not with others, but by ourselves,—whether we pray so at all, and *how* we pray, would settle the question at once, with many, whether or not we are worldlings, and how far we really in our hearts trust and lean upon God. Public prayer may depend on other things: on our wish to keep a good character, on our being accustomed to it, on our wishing to please and keep well with others; nay, the very earnestness of public prayer may depend on our feeling ourselves with others, and being carried away for the moment by *their* earnestness, and the stirring words or sounds of confession or praise. But prayer in private, where no one knows what we are doing, depends on whether we think it worth while to ask God's help and to acknowledge His goodness; and if we do not pray in private, it shows what is our real opinion of the good of prayer,—it shows that we do not believe it to be of use or value enough to us to make us do it, for ever so short a time, *for its own sake*, and

when no one is by to see us. It shows that we do not believe that God really watches over us, or that we depend on strength or wisdom besides our own.

Another proof is our way of bearing disappointments, troubles, losses—the crosses and vexations which come upon all of us in our turn, as we go through life. Nothing shows more plainly than this whether we are indeed acknowledging the Lord in all our ways, for this discovers to us for certain whether indeed we believe that all things come from God's ordering; and also, that there is nothing that He sends on us but He sends it out of love for our souls, out of the desire to do us good in the end. Perhaps it is the kind severity and sharp mercy of the Good Physician to heal what is amiss in us by the bitter but needful medicine of trial and distress.

Now, this is what comes at once to the mind of him who acknowledges God in all his ways: he believes in Him, and so believing, he tries to be patient, he tries to bear his affliction with thankfulness; he thinks of it as coming not by chance, but from the hand of One whom he can trust, and who has said that it is necessary for men to be afflicted that they may be proved and purified by sorrow. But if we have not acknowledged God, or acknowledged Him outwardly only, and not in our secret thoughts, we think of such troubles as if they came at random and by chance; we ask why we are tried, and not others; we think ourselves hardly dealt with; we murmur and complain at our trial; we are angry or jealous with those around us, as if it were a shame that they should be spared when we

are not. And thus we show two things: one, that we do not really believe what God has said about its being He who sends trouble, and sends it out of love; and the other, that all we really care about is of this world, and when that is taken away from us we have no other hope: nay, when it is cut short and made less, by however little, we feel as if something which was our right, something for which we had laboured as our reward and treasure, is lost, without anything to make up for it.

Another proof is, the care we take to keep in order our words and our secret thoughts as we pass through the day. "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways," says the Scripture; and how should we acknowledge Him better than by showing how constantly what He loves and desires comes into our thoughts, and keeps us from saying and thinking what, if we sought only our own will, we should think and say. It is not by talking of Him that we acknowledge Him, and prove to His all-seeing eye that we are thinking about Him. We may talk of Him when others are by, and like to listen, and encourage us to talk; and then forget Him when we are left alone, and go back in our thoughts to the world. It must be by owning Him where only He can see that we do own Him.

When, for love and fear of Him, we keep back a bitter or ill-natured word that no one knew we were going to say, then we do nothing for the praise of men, but we acknowledge Him in secret. When for fear and love of Him we not only set a watch on our lips, but keep a guard also on our thoughts,—drive away all things that we ought not to think

about,—check and keep down our passion when it is rising,—then this is something which is meant only for His eye; for the eye of man cannot see what was in our hearts, and would not have known anything about it if we had indulged our thoughts. But if we let our thoughts run riot, and say that no eye shall see them, and no one think the worse of us for them; if we prefer to say the first harsh or unkind thing that comes up to our lips when we are vexed and angry, instead of keeping it under, though it cost us a struggle; if we give our hearts liberty to long for, and run after, the good things of this world, and say that there is no harm in it; if we let our souls be burdened or surfeited with the cares or with the pleasures of this world; if we have no time for thoughts about God and our eternal state, and put them out of the way, that we may give ourselves more completely to our worldly interests,—if we do all this, how can any one deceive himself with thinking that he is acknowledging God in all his ways? How can he doubt that he is in reality forgetting God, and giving himself only to this present world? How can he doubt that he is leaning only on his own understanding,—that he is one of those who are wise in their own eyes, and so think themselves wiser than God and His word; that he is going through life as if he did not belong to God, and was left to himself to get what he could out of this world, and then to lie down and perish, without any hope, without any further reckoning to come?

Will you trust yourselves to yourselves or to God? That is the question. I do not say, will

you have your portion in this world or in the next? For no man would like to think that this was the alternative before him; and no man dares say even to himself that he has chosen this world before the other. But, indeed, you can find out pretty clearly whether you are trusting yourselves to God's wisdom and guidance, or leaning to your own understanding, and thinking that you can take care of yourselves without God. You can find out whether you are now going through life, *keeping God in mind*, as day follows day; or whether you are going through it *without* keeping Him in mind. And if you are forgetting Him, where are you walking to? What will be the end of your journey? Will your own understanding, to which you lean, deliver you from sickness, from tribulation, from death? Will that wisdom of your own, which is sufficient for you in your own eyes, which makes you, in your own opinion, sharper and more knowing in worldly matters than other men, and on which you depend to help you to rise in the world,—will *that* wisdom stand you in stead to get you out of the snares of death, to redeem your soul when you are falling into the power of the grave, to wash out your sins, to set you free from the bands of a long worldly life to escape from God's all-seeing eye, to deliver you in the day of judgment, and to shelter you from the wrath of God? Will it serve to keep in your possession what you have got in this world; will it help you to carry away your riches with you when you die, and secure you from the loss you so fear now? Will it, as you grow on in life, help you to a peaceful and quiet old age? Will it make your bed

easier when you are sick? Will it make up to you for the waste of strength, and for the years that are gone, and never can come back, when you are waiting in weakness and pain and anxiety for the call to die?

There is nothing that will stand you in stead then but feeling that you have trusted yourself to God; that you have taken yourself, as it were, out of your own hands, given up your own will, renounced your own wisdom, and committed yourself to Him, who can indeed keep that which has been committed to Him against that day. But if you would have that blessedness—and there is no blessedness on this side the grave to compare with that of feeling oneself no longer in our own hands but in God's—it will not do to wait. It will not do to put your trust in yourself while you are strong and well and young and thriving, and think that it will be time enough to put your trust in God when you are obliged to give up trusting yourself.

No; it takes a long time to *learn* to trust in the Lord, and to acknowledge Him in all our ways. Those who most try to do it, who most wish to leave themselves, and all that belongs to them, to His manifest ordering,—who have most reason to hope that they have given up trusting to their own understanding and wisdom in what concerns this life here, —are reminded to the last how imperfectly they have learnt the lesson; how often, without knowing it, they are setting their will before God's will, and fancying that they know better than God what is best for them. And if this is so with those who try to leave themselves in God's hands, how shall they

who never seriously try themselves at all be able to do so when the time of trouble comes?

Oh, what light and peace would it shed round our path if, indeed, we trusted in the Lord with all our heart, and acknowledged Him in all our ways! Such godliness had ever the promise of the life that now is: "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." And those who have trusted God's word, who have given up some present worldly profit to honour God's law more fully, have found the promise made good, and have not been losers by their self-denial. But this is the least part; for even the worldly prosperity which has God's blessing on it must perish at last, like all things earthly, in the day when we are too weak or too sick to enjoy it. The blessedness of trusting God and not ourselves is higher and deeper and surer than this. When we are but our own guides we can never be sure that we are not mistaken. When we trust God we know that we are in hands which cannot fail, and that, come what may upon us, however painful, however much it may seem to be against us, it cannot be evil, for it is God's doing. Giving ourselves up to Him, we shall feel sure that His love will never lead us wrong, though it may lead us into sorrow and tribulation. We shall know and feel assured that there are ends of which we shall one day, either in this life or the next, see the infinite mercy, in the darkest and strangest dispensation of what, in man's eyes, is hopeless desolation. Even then we shall be able to lift up our hands and

give thanks; for we shall know that we are walking safely, although in darkness. "Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. . . . For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken."

This is comfort which none of us can make sure of, by his own wisdom and strength, in the day of trouble. This is a stay and a peace for the soul, which alone can keep us from being overwhelmed when the great water-floods come upon us. And which of us can tell whether he may not need it to-morrow?

## XIX

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNBELIEF

"And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."—ST. MATTHEW xiii. 58.

WHAT a strange and sad state of things does this verse bring up into our thoughts! Just think of what is meant by it. There was, on the one hand, the mercy and power of God present to help, present to bless; and there were, on the other hand, crowds of men needing in all kinds of ways the help of that mercy and power. There was the Redeemer, come from heaven, to tell the glad tidings which all the world had been longing for,—come from heaven, to bring the long-promised deliverance which generation after generation had hoped and waited for; and there were the men who were eagerly hoping for that deliverance, whose one great thought was that of a Saviour who was sure to come; whose whole life in the world, whose doings, public and private, whose views of duty, whose schemes and prospects and ventures were all shaped and governed by this wonderful hope; who at this very moment were on tiptoe expectation, full of restlessness and agitation, because they thought that the time was come at last. There, on the one hand, was He in whom

God's promise was fulfilled, Jesus Christ, with His hands full of gifts and His lips full of comfort and wisdom. There, on the other hand, were the children and heirs of the promise, thirsting, groping, fainting, after its accomplishment; sick men wanting to be healed, hungry men wanting to be fed, men vexed and troubled with unclean spirits wanting to be restored to liberty, sinful men wanting to be cleansed, eager and anxious and perplexed spirits wanting to be taught and enlightened and consoled. That was just what He had come for; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." That day was "the Scripture fulfilled" in their ears. There were the "poor," the "broken-hearted," the "captives," the "blind," the "bruised"; and there, before them, was the Healer, the Consoler, full of desire for His work. There was God's grace, ready to flow over, seeking, striving to find those for whom to do its mighty works; and there were those whose days were spent in looking out for its coming, and for whose necessities and sufferings, in body and soul, it was the only hope. There they were both together,—the power and goodness of Christ, and they who so deeply needed them. But the two could not meet. It was as if there were an invincible barrier between them. Christ was with His lost sheep, and we know what He could and would have done for them; but something kept Him from them, and them from Him.

"He did not many mighty works there," says St. Matthew, "because of their unbelief." St. Mark is bolder still. "He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief."

The hindrance of their unbelief was the one limit to the Lord's power. He could heal the sick and cleanse the lepers and raise the dead. In the soul which was willing, which stirred itself up to attend to His word and look to His goodness, He could work wonders; He could take away sin, He could give light, He could give holiness and strength, which were new in the world. But the soul of man is free. And when men use their freedom in refusing to bend to His grace and His power to heal them, even His grace and His power meet a barrier and check at which they must stop. Against the evil heart of unbelief God has many influences, many gracious persuasions, infinite ways of visiting and moving it; but after all, and at the last, there is one awful liberty reserved for it which belongs to it alone, and which God does not touch,—the liberty of choosing finally for itself whether it will yield to God or resist Him; whether it will see or whether it will be blind. With these Jews, there was Jesus Christ ready to heal, to save, to comfort them; but at the last it must depend on themselves whether they would let Him help them. They would not, therefore He could not.

I suppose that it is true still that Christ does not do, *cannot* do, His mighty works,—the works which He came from heaven to do for men,—because of men's unbelief.

Christ came, indeed, to do yet greater works among men than even those which He was willing to do among the Jews. He came to work a work on earth greater even than healing the sick and cleansing the lepers and giving comfort to a few sufferers or a few mourners. He came to do a work in the souls of men, not in Judæa only, but throughout the world,—not in those few years of His presence here on earth, but throughout all generations of mankind to come,—compared with which the wonderful things done to men's bodies by His hands and by His word were little. He came to change, to fashion anew, the race of mankind. It had gone astray from God and His goodness, and He came to lead it back. It had fallen into miserable ruin and sin, and He came to restore it. It had taken an evil turn, which seemed past remedy, —it seemed to be sinking more and more hopelessly and widely into depths of sin,—struggling hard, but struggling in vain, to lift itself out of its corruption, and to escape from the snare; and He came to show it the way back to peace, to take away its sins, to help it against its sinfulness, to bring men the grace and power by which they might in very deed correct and amend themselves, and rise up to the truth of a pure and holy life. He came to die for our sins, and to rise again, that men, who had fallen away so far from God, and had fallen so low, might die to sin, and rise again unto righteousness. He came, that is, to change our whole life; to change the world; to create anew the very nature of man, which sin and evil had spoiled so fearfully. He came to make men know and love the Father they

had forgotten. He came to make them give up their sins, and recover once more the goodness which they had lost. He came to give us thoughts about ourselves, and about God's dealings with us, which it could never have entered into the mind of man to imagine. The shadow of death, of a death without hope and with many fears, rested upon our life; He came that we might henceforth live our life here in the light of the life everlasting.

These were the mighty works which He came to do in the world; and, as we know, He did them. His coming did change the world. His coming has made all the difference between what men have known and thought, and hoped for and tried after, and become, *since* He was with us, and what they were *before* He came. And that difference is indeed a great one. We may be disappointed that it is not greater; that His grace, which has wrought such wonderful changes among men, has seemed to leave its work faulty and half done; that the fruits of the Gospel have not been more perfect; that the spread of His Church, and the conversion of nations to His faith,—so astonishing, so deep and lasting in its effects,—have been checked before the whole world was won, and have been troubled by so many scandals.

But if He has not done all that we might have expected, what He has done is clear and plain. He has spread new knowledge and goodness and hope in the world. He has brought a new law of holiness into the hearts of men. He has taught them heavenly lessons of love and truth and purity, and given them besides grace to learn them. He has

given success to repentance, and made it bear fruit in deep and increasing improvement. He has chastened and purified the inward thoughts and wills of sinful men. He has put it into their hearts to love and serve God in truth and sincerity. He has strengthened the hands and enlightened the eyes of those who were trying hard to become better. He has made men glad to deny themselves, and to offer themselves a living sacrifice to do His good work and follow His steps. He has leavened the world, even the unbelieving, the indifferent, the disobedient part of it, with His Spirit, and His higher thoughts of what is right and just and good. Age after age He has kept up and preserved, amidst chastisements and deliverances, the Church universal, which He founded to minister grace and truth to men, and the visible lessons of holy living, and a heavenly hope. Age after age men like ourselves have been transformed by His grace into very copies of His example, and faith and good courage have been kept alive by the presence of His saints. These are the mighty works which He really came to do, and which He has done among men.

What He has come to do for men He has come to do for each one of them to whom the knowledge of His Gospel is brought. So He has come to do all these mighty works among *us*. He means that we, in our distant corners of the earth, should be witnesses and partakers of that grace which has won back mankind from evil to God; which has given new goodness, new hopes, new peace, new strength, to men; which has made them servants

and children of the Father, and led them through the darkness of this world and death to the everlasting light beyond. Here, as elsewhere, He is spoken of and known; He comes, He is ready, He is able to do for us what He has done so often for others; to open the eyes, blinded by the glitter of present things; to heal the sick—long sick with sins which have taken fast hold; to cleanse the heart, which feels itself almost too deeply polluted even to attempt to repent and draw nigh to God; to give strength and life to the feeble spirit, which knows that it is going on wrong, and is too dull, too hopeless, too entangled, to break through the snares which keep it from the good it would do. He comes to break the yoke of worldly custom and fear, which we feel with shame upon our necks; to unloose the bonds which bind us captive to our bad ways; to help us when we fall, and raise us up again, and keep us from falling; to give us the good thoughts which we wish for, even when we have them not. He comes to raise up our dead souls from the carelessness which we have let them sink into; to give us an interest in those great hopes which we hear so much about, but which so often we bitterly feel are nothing to us. These are the mighty works of Christ among men. These is He ready to do for us. Does He really do them among us? If not, why does He not do them?

Blessed be His Name for whatever good is among us; but when we think of what He came to do, and what He has shown Himself able to do, no one, I think, would like to deceive himself by saying that he was satisfied and struck by what he sees

around him of the mighty works of Christ, in making new and purifying the souls of men, in raising them above themselves, and above what is merely of this world, to a better and holier way of living. Christ is ready to save and bless us. And we, with all our carelessness, with all our sins, feel in our hearts how much we want, how greatly we come short of what our conscience shows us; what troubles and anxieties there are for which we have no remedy; how painful and how comfortless is our want of settled peace, and our unfaithfulness to duty, and the dimness and uncertainty of our hope. The Redeemer, the Deliverer, is there; and we want help and grace and the Deliverer's power. And yet we cannot come together.

For between Him and us there stands in the way our unbelief. Not the unbelief which denies or doubts; for we receive His word, and would not, I hope, speak against it. Not the unbelief, like that of so many among the Jews, which could not get over the prejudices of a mistaken faith and the offence of a Redeemer on the cross instead of on a throne; for we are accustomed to glory in those things which to the Jews were shame. It is no matter of wanting signs and wonders from heaven, of disappointed expectation, or of reasons not strong enough to convince us. The unbelief which is between us and Christ is of another sort. It is that state of heart and feeling which dislikes the strain and trouble of thinking of things out of this present world; which looks away from what is out of sight and to come, and is moved and impressed only by what is just before it—immediate interests, imme-

diate pleasures, common customs. It is the unbelief of carelessness, deadness of soul, lazy, selfish indifference; which cannot understand how any one can be in earnest, so as to take pains and suffer trouble for the sake of things unseen; which cannot bring itself to think that God is in earnest, and the work of serving and pleasing Him a real thing. It is the unbelief which comes of wishing to save ourselves trouble, of not thinking it worth while to force ourselves to attend, to think, to remember, to lay to heart.

This is the unbelief which comes between us and the power of Christ to improve us, to strengthen us, to comfort us. What we *will* not have done for us that He cannot do. His Coming, His Passion, His Rising again, His Power, His Spirit,—those awful mysteries which have made all things new to man,—alas! even they fail and lose their force to change and heal before the empty, thoughtless, frivolous soul, which will not rise up to think what they must mean. We are not what Christians were meant to be; we have only to read the New Testament to see that. The great things which Christ said of His disciples are not fulfilled in us. Nor need we be surprised. We do not disbelieve them, we do not doubt them. We only do not think them so serious and so real as to be worth going out of ourselves, going out of our old ways and fashions, to meet them,—as to be worth caring about and taking pains for in good earnest.

Do not let us waste our time in vain regrets, vain wishes, vain confessions of our weakness and folly. We need healing, and the power of Christ is ready

to heal us. We need to be better men, and He is able to change and mend and strengthen us. We need comfort,—at least, we shall one day or other sorely need it,—and He is ever calling, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He is able to do all this for us; He is ever making it all known to us. Let not that one barrier of our own unwillingness keep us from sharing, each in our own place and measure, in that light and goodness and comfort which have gladdened and transformed this world, and made it a new place for men to live in, to work and to die in. Let it not be that, simply from our slavery to custom and to things before us,—from our idle trifling with the truth which we confess,—from our blindness to the greatness of what has been done for us,—from our dull shrinking from the real meaning of our own words and the convictions of our consciences,—we are none the better for our Lord having come; none the better as men; none the better in our hope of what is to come.

Let us pray, and not only pray, but do our best, that it may not be said, in the long run, of our religious history, Christ "did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

## XX

## THE CHRISTIAN RACE

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain."—1 CORINTHIANS ix. 24.

ALL run, for the race is human life; and all must run it somehow, whether they will or no. But there are many ways of running it, and many endings to the race. All must run, but many run without hope of the prize, and many throw it away. Many run because they cannot help it, and never try at all; and many try hard, but find at the end of their running that they have run in vain.

All run, but the prize of human life is not for all running; it is not the mere running which ensures the prize; it is the running "so as to obtain." All run, but the prize is for those who win.

What is our life for, and what are we doing with it? What are we living for, and what good do we expect that our having lived here will do us at the end? Here we are all of us together, running our appointed race, the race of which much has been run, and of which the remainder is quickly shortening,—shortening as quickly as the hours pass, and bringing us ever nearer to the point where we are to stop, having either won or lost. The race of life,

and the race for what life is worth! What do we see around us of the running and its success?

We see much idle running; running without a thought of what the running is for; running without end or purpose; running carelessly, without trouble and at random, as if all were play and nothing were earnest,—a game for passing the time, with no duties, nothing to be serious about.

We see the slothful servant, with the only talent by which he could do his Lord any service, wrapping it in the napkin and putting it away out of his sight, that even the sight of it might not trouble his laziness, and quietly making up his mind that he had nothing more to do than to sit idle, and play and sleep, till his Lord comes back.

We see the foolish virgin go forward to meet the dreadful hour—the coming of which no one knows—gaily and lightly, and scorning to trouble her mind with thinking of what may be, and of what one day may run short. She has lighted her lamp, and the Bridegroom will come in good time; the lamp will take care of itself for as long as it is wanted. Her careful sister may be over-cautious if she likes,—over-anxious, and burden herself with the supply of oil which never may be needed; she will not vex herself with these too busy cares; she will trust her luck, and take things as they come.

We see the great company of the thoughtless, the selfish, moving on recklessly towards the fearful Left Hand. All around them are the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the naked, the prisoners; all around are the piercing cries for help, but they hear nothing; their eyes are blinded, and see not Christ needing to be

ministered unto; they only ask why they should not do what they like with their own—harming no one, helping no one.

The prodigal son takes his half of the inheritance and goes forth, with the world before him; the time goes lightly and easily, and he crowns it with idleness and amusement, and then darkens and defiles it with sin; and he cares nothing where it is bringing him, or what he is on the way to become.

To such running, to such runners, what good has their life brought them? Some vain delights, they may say, they caught at while the time was hurrying by; it was sweet to taste the pleasures of sin for a season; it was sweet to take things easily, and not to look forward; it was sweet to do nothing,—to spare oneself the drudgery, the responsibility, the struggle. But all that is soon over, and the end must come. The prize of the running is at its end; the gain and success of life is what it brings at last. *All* are in the race; but what chance of the prize for those who will not look where they run, who stop to pick the flowers in their running, who lie down and go to sleep?

There is much earnest, patient, serious running too: running which succeeds and gains its triumph, —a triumph which all can see. The world and this life has much to give and much to win, and many runners gain it; much, no doubt, that is base and bad, and not worth running for; but much, too, that God Himself has given men to run for here, and meant them to strive for, and given them a reward for winning it. But of all that man runs for, and wins here, the best, the most innocent, the noblest,

there is this to be said: it is of this world, and this world passes away; it belongs to this life, and this life ends in the grave.

And it is of the prize of human life and human running that the Apostle speaks. Can *that* be its prize which, when we have reached it, we must lay down and give back again? If riches and honour reward our running, is it any great success to have got for a moment what the next moment we must leave behind? Is it so great and delightful a lot to have what we have longed for put within our hands, only for it to be at once torn from them? Is that our prize which, as soon as we have got it, we must have done with for ever, and be as though we had never had it? Is that the worth of our life? Is our running, our care, our toil, our waiting, so easily repaid that we think ourselves well satisfied by just touching what slips from our fingers and perishes in the using? Do we not feel at last that to have to leave our great prizes behind us, not knowing what shall become of them, turns those great prizes into little worth? The end to which we must come fixes their real value. If *then* they are nothing, and we have run all our lives for them, then, just when our running should win its reward, it has won nothing. If there was any reward in them it was really in the running, in the living, in the having life.

But surely God made us to live for some purpose; He did not give us this wonderful life of ours merely to live while we lived. He gave it that something might come of it; that at the end we might feel that we had not lived for nothing; that life

had given us something of our own, something not to be lost or taken away. Are we really to run these our Christian lives as men used to run when they had no hope beyond? Are we content to pass our days as blindly, and is it enough for us to be in our aims and ends no better for that incredible change in the prospects of human life, of which eighteen centuries has not yet worn out the wonder, which was made when the Word became Flesh; when the Son of God was crucified for our sins; when He overcame the sharpness of death, and "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers"?

No; when we come to the end, and think what we have run for, and what we have won, it is not the things which we must leave behind us which will satisfy our hearts, and seem like the prize. It is not our success, our riches, our name, our family. They are ours now. But let a few days pass, and what will they be to us and we to them when death is between us? No, it is not in those things that we shall feel that we have not run in vain.

Doubtless there are things at the end, at the very end, when all here is departing from us, and going for ever, which, even while we are here in the flesh in this world, keep life from seeming a failure, and glorify its very last steps with peace and triumph. But it is not the thought of what we have gained and are now going to lose; it is not the thought of what we have long enjoyed and are now to see no more for ever. It is not this.

But there are deathbeds where all is still, holy, calm; where what is coming is not feared, but only waited for with hoping, patient, trusting solemnity

and awe; where loving hands are always ready in their ministries of comfort, and loving lips are ever whispering words of peace, and the last sight to dying eyes are the loving eyes which watch them; where the air seems full of unearthly thoughts of the Great Sufferer, and all hearts are bursting with such memories as they never had before of His agony, His passion, His dying; where, once more, the leave-taking before the hour of death between him who is going and those who stay is kept as He kept it in the breaking of the bread and with the cup of suffering and salvation; where all feel entering under the shadow of the world to come, and over all broods with new and strange power the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

That is a time, awful as it is, when we feel that life is not vanity; that God has indeed given them something worth running and waiting for. *That* is worth living for, even on this side the grave.

We have all heard of men whose last act on earth was love to their brethren. They have died giving their lives for others; they have put themselves in the way of entire destruction, that by perishing themselves they might keep others from perishing. With unmoved eyes they have seen their death drawing nearer and nearer, and have only thought of helping the weak and comforting the miserable: with the alternative of life and death between themselves and another, they have quietly chosen death; they have stood fast and let the fire burn them, or the fierce sea bury them, that others might escape, or because it was their place and their duty.

It is a blessed end of life to die in a Christian

home, and to meet death in the way of duty and for duty's sake; much more to be, in however distant a way, made like to Him who said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This is indeed to part with life amid light and triumph. In such endings of the race surely there is a victory, surely there is a hope full of immortality.

But can we say with truth that they are the prize of our running,—that they are the prize of human life?

No; the prize, the real prize of human life, can be nothing on this side of the grave. All on this side is the running; the running, with many partial encouragements and rewards to those who run faithfully, with great and enlarging hopes to the end. But the prize of it cannot be here; for the things that are seen are temporal,—but for a time,—and the things that are eternal are the things that are not seen. And that for which man was made, that which he is called to run for and to obtain, is eternal. It is out of our reach and sight, and above our thoughts,—"that which God hath prepared for them that love Him." It is in the everlasting world, free from change, safe from loss and decay, that "eternal weight of glory," which is "the prize of the high calling of God"; that unfading crown and incorruptible inheritance which the Bible hangs up before our sight and hopes. It is in the other world that man's destiny is to be fulfilled, and that for which he was created and sent into this world to fight his way and learn his lesson, and be tried and buffeted, chastened and disciplined, is to be at last made

manifest. Then, and not till then. Here we only run. We all run, wisely or not,—after what is worth running for, or after what will fail us even when we have gained it. There it is that it will be made manifest how we have run, and who has not run in vain.

Let us look then to that end. Let us try to run so that we may obtain. An Apostle was not absolutely sure how he was running; and if St. Paul felt at times misgivings, I am sure that we may well put some sharp cross-questioning upon ourselves. The question is whether our life at last shall have been in vain, and shall have been thrown away; or whether we shall have used it as God meant it to be used, and so shall be ready to blossom forth into something infinitely greater and more glorious after this world—into something which will not be unworthy of a life and a kingdom which God and Christ assure us are to be for ever.

*For ever:* that is what you are running for; that is what you are preparing yourselves for. For ever. You know what is not for ever, even this present time; but when this is done, and death is passed through, then begins for ever.

Even if we had no such prize in view, it would be better not to be idle, not to be frivolous, not to be wasteful of our chances,—to do our best. But if this were all we know but too well what the world and its success must turn out, even when men have run well and not in vain for its rewards. But now we know where we are going, and why we are called to run. The other world is opened; that is why we are here. Corruption shall put on incorruption, and

mortality be swallowed up in life; that is why we are called to run and work, and become fit to begin the life of angels, and that endless service of which we can understand so little but that it is only for the holy. Men run bravely, men work hard, and suffer long for this world. Oh let them not put us to shame who believe in another. They do it for a corruptible crown; and with the incorruptible crown within our reach, shall we lose it? Oh, my brethren, let us run, let us live in earnest; not without aim and hope, but looking forward by faith to that which one day must be. Let us not be slack, faint-hearted, self-indulgent, in that race which is at once so easy and so difficult; so easy because, with God's grace, it wants nothing but a true heart in earnest; so hard because it *does* want the true heart in earnest.

Let us hear our great teacher: "I therefore so run, not as at random; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway."

Do we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come? And has not some one said, "Many are called, but few are chosen"? Strive—strive as if for your life, to enter in at the strait gate; "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

## XXI

## GOD'S VISITATIONS TO HIS PEOPLE

"Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."—
ST. LUKE xix. 44.

JERUSALEM, the chosen city of God, knew not the time of her visitation; did not understand what was going on, and what she was called to do, when her Lord came with mercy and judgment to try her heart. And, therefore, that sad prospect of ruin which made the Lord weep when He beheld the city. He saw that the city and people which had been so highly favoured had after all missed the great prize which God had set before them, and for which He had been so long preparing them. The Hope of Israel,—that for which they had been waiting for hundreds of years,—that for which they had endured so much,—that which they had all believed in, and trusted to so earnestly,—the Hope of Israel, the long-promised Saviour, had actually come, and they would not know Him, they would not receive him.

"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace."

Here was the moment come for the fulfilment of God's promise; here was given them, here before

their very eyes was set forth, favour and mercy and grace, far beyond all that their fathers had ever dreamed of. If in former generations they had misunderstood God's dealings, here was a day of redemption and glory, which, if they accepted it, would make up for all that had gone wrong before.

"If thou, even thou," the nation whom God had chosen and enlightened and blessed above all other people ;—"if at least in this thy day," when the Son of God had come to bring His message of salvation and blessing in His own person, to speak to them face to face, to do the works of the Father among them ;—"if thou," after all thy former sins and failures, had now at last, now in this greatest of all thy chances, only known how near thou wert to peace and glory, how great the blessing in thy reach, how easy to stretch forth thy hand to receive it ;—"if thou hadst but known!"

But Jerusalem would not know her hour of mercy and acceptance. It passed away ; and the Lord saw, and wept as He saw, that it was gone. It was too late. God had promised great things ; the time for them had come ; but Jerusalem had not known the time, and now they were hid from her eyes. Now there was nothing left but to meet the disasters and punishments from which her Saviour had come to deliver her ; the disasters and punishments which come on those who are too proud and careless to mind when God means to save them. Her enemies were to come and destroy her, and her children within her, and were to leave not one stone upon another ; "because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Not to know the time of our visitation means not to know when God is giving us opportunities of good; not to feel and be alive to the blessings which His providence is putting in our reach; not to see when the time comes, as it comes to all, which is meant specially to suit our necessities, and to open for us the door to peace and mercy.

That time of peace comes in very different ways to different persons: the time which brings with it advantages and chances of a special kind for escaping from sin, for turning in earnest to God, for making fresh steps onwards in goodness and holiness. There are many different sorts of these visitations of God to the souls of men. They are always the openings and beginnings of new mercies, more than had been vouchsafed before. But there is about all of them this danger—that those to whom they come should not know the time of their visitation.

And there is additional danger of so failing when these visitations of God's providence and mercy are not, as they were to the Jews, accompanied by strange outward marks of God's power. If, in spite of the wonderful works of Jesus Christ, the Jews mistook Him, misunderstood Him,—did not discern the tokens of His heavenly grace and power, and so missed the opportunity which He gave them of peace and glory and blessing,—how much more easy to miss it when it comes to us in the common course of our lives, without any appearance of what is extraordinary and wonderful!

The days were when God's presence was revealed by visible miracle and sign and judgment. He was

known to be near us by the earthquake and the wind and the fire; but now those are passed away, and it is only the still small voice in the secret heart which tells us that the Lord is nigh. And if men could be heedless of the manifest and open sign of His presence, they are in great danger of not hearing that still small voice.

The real dealings of God with our souls are out of sight. We cannot now, as in the days of miracles, lay our hands on them and say, Lo here, or Lo there. We cannot make certain of each particular movement, each separate call, each undoubted instance of Divine working. The Spirit, when He witnesses with our spirit, does so in ways that are secret between our heart and Him, and to no one can we really reveal that secret and make it plain. If, then, the blindness and selfishness of man were able to resist the outward call and the manifest token, much more the whisper of conscience, and the solemn but gentle appeals of Providence. If men were not persuaded that the time of their visitation was upon them when they beheld the Lord heal the sick and raise the dead, we may well fear for ourselves lest we miss our opportunity of mercy, lest we do not perceive and heed God's visitation, which comes seeming to be nothing more than the common things which happen to us; seeming to be clothed and veiled in the ordinary changes and chances of our mortal life.

There is one sort of visitation from God which many of us are going through now. How many of us are leading a quiet and peaceful life, without anything apparently to try us greatly, anything greatly

to disturb and trouble us; no great sorrow, no great pain, no great fear, no great disadvantage to struggle with, no great care to weigh us down. There are the common temptations and burdens which belong to the lot of all men. But those surely are little to speak of when we think what men have had to go through, what might have come upon us and has not. And in this kind of life we go on undisturbed from year to year perhaps. No great change happens in it for worse or, for what the world calls better. It is even, quiet, safe. We do what we have to do. We work, if we must work; we have our time to ourselves if we are not bound to work. We look out on the course of other men's lives, on the ups and downs, the wonderful success and the wonderful ruin, which go on round us; on the wars and commotions of other lands, the "distress of nations, with perplexity; . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." But we look on at a distance; none of these things come nigh us to touch us. Peace and quiet is our portion, the regular unbroken order of our lives.

I can well imagine people sometimes being almost frightened at the perfect peace and stillness in which their lives flow on, with everything given them that they can really need, kept safe from all that they fear, and that seems to come so easily on men like themselves. I can almost understand people thinking that something dreadful must be coming on them some day to make up for the long time that they have been left free from trouble and pain.

This is faithless fear. God does not deal with

us in this way. He does not make a certain amount of evil weigh against and balance a certain amount of good. He gives us good and evil by a different rule; one which we cannot understand, but which we may be sure is not one of cruelty and delight in disappointing us.

Let us enjoy the blessings which He gives us: our quiet days, our health and peace and safety; and let us hope on in the mercy which has been with us so long.

But there are two things to be remembered, which we are apt to forget. One is, that, without superstitiously vexing ourselves with the thought that God must bring evil on us in proportion to the good, it is yet true that all this quiet cannot go on as it is for ever—that we must expect one time or another some of the trials of life. It is not likely that we shall always escape pain or vexation or sickness so entirely as we are doing now; we are still men, and the covenant of sorrow and death is not given us. This is one thing: and the other is, that this time of quiet, of leisure, of freedom from the burdens of sorrow and pain, is a time of visitation; a time when God is visiting us,—visiting us as truly as He visited Jerusalem when He sent His Son to tell of the kingdom of heaven,—visiting us by many a blessing as truly as He visits and searches other men by His chastisements and judgments. In this time of peace and regular work, and quiet days and nights of sweet sleep, He is preparing us, He is trying us. He is giving us time, full ample time, to fit ourselves to meet harsher and heavier ways of His providence. He is seeing what is in our hearts, whether we have it in us to

be thankful to Him, whether so much mercy and favour will draw our hearts to Him, and strengthen our purposes and efforts after goodness; whether *we* can be made better in the way in which He would make all men better if it were possible, by giving us the desires of our hearts, and keeping us in safety from the evil we are afraid of.

This is our time of visitation; and how do we use it? Do we even think as we ought that it *is* a time of visitation? When some great trouble or sorrow comes upon us, then, if we have any religion at all, we have no difficulty in understanding that God is visiting us. Then we feel it to be natural to recognise His searching and trying hand. Whether we bow to it or resist it, it at any rate sobers and solemnises us; and we feel—to our cost, perhaps, we say—that the Lord is near, that the hand of the Lord has touched us. But do we remember that the hand of the Lord is upon us, that His eye is beholding us when He goes on keeping us safe day after day, driving away sickness and death from our door, giving us time and strength and spirit to go on doing our work and our labour till the evening, blessing our basket and our store, doing good to us and to our children? Do we remember that surely He is observing how we take all this?

Surely we *may* take it very ill. We may be all this time growing more and more selfish, more and more thankless, more and more turned away from God, more and more in love with the present world. We may be lazy, and think it too much trouble to stop and think what we owe to God; too much trouble to examine ourselves whether we are receiving our

good things as Christians and religious men, or as those whose hope and portion is in this life; too much trouble to see whether we really say our prayers in earnest, and are asking God to help us not to abuse our blessings.

Surely it is but too easy, in the midst of peace and mercy, fenced in from trouble, and with mind and body at ease,—it is but too easy to forget the great seriousness of life: where we are going to, whom we have to deal with, what He has given us to do, how we shall one day have to give an account of what we have had and enjoyed. And if we do, we are missing our day of visitation; we are hearing without heeding the call of God; we are failing under our appointed trial, just as if that trial were one of sorrow and suffering, and we murmured and resisted it. The time of our visitation is upon us, and we are not knowing it.

Remember this too. Now, in this time of peace, and probably more or less leisure, is the time to fit ourselves to meet trouble when it comes—to arm our souls with that faith and trust in God which will alone keep us up when the weather changes and the storm and winter come on us. It is not when we are sick that we can expect to learn how to bear sickness. It is not when death darkens our doors that we can hope to be taught at once the thoughts and feelings which help the believer in Christ to keep fast his confidence, and not to sorrow as those who have no hope.

It is those who have learned beforehand to believe in God who are able to put forth their belief when the moment comes when it is wanted. And

now is the time given you to gain this firm, quiet, real trust in God. Now nothing disturbs you. Now you have no pain to take off your thoughts, to weaken your body. Now you have no bitterness of sorrow to fill up your heart. You have time to think, to read, to consider, to give quiet, calm attention to the things which most concern your peace. If anything strikes you in what you read or hear, you can turn it over in your mind till you have become accustomed to it, and it has become part of your very self.

The soldier who is to fight well must learn his exercise in time of peace; and now is your time of peace, your time of learning. Oh, see that you use it. See that when the time of real trial comes it does not find you unprepared, and only beginning to think about putting on your armour when you want in good earnest to have it on and ready for use. See that with so much goodness and mercy appointed for your lot in life; with so much grace offered you; with the promises and redemption of the Lord of Life continually before you; with the choice blessings of the kingdom of heaven made your heritage, not only without money and without price, but, so far, without the sacrifices and the tribulations which had to be endured by our elder brethren in Christ, and which still have to be endured by so many now alive,—with all this lot of loving-kindness and peace appointed you,—with your trial made so easy and so gentle, instead of being painful and difficult,—see that you do not miss recognising, as it passes over you, "the time of your visitation."

## XXII

## NO DIVIDED SERVICE TO GOD

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."—ST. MATT. vi. 24.

THE Gospel for this morning is one of those passages which are very hard to preach upon. To preach upon, I mean, wisely, faithfully, honestly, making the words mean what they do mean, refraining from making them seem to mean what they do not mean. It is easy, very easy, taking them as they stand, and putting a strain upon them, to draw lessons from them which should be very startling and very impressive. It would be very easy, taking their simple literal expressions, to show how great is the difference between the way of thinking and living which they hold up, and that which we are all accustomed to. It would be easy to ask, How is it possible to reconcile the life of business and worldly employment, the life of money-making, which is the ordinary one in our world, with the saying, "No man can serve two masters; . . . ye cannot serve God and mammon"? It would be easy to set side by side the care which we all of us think it right to have about the time to come, the value and the praise which we ascribe to the habit of looking

forward, of being provident, of laying up against the evil day, or for those who are to come after us; and, on the other hand, the words which sound like a condemnation of this very spirit of painstaking thought and care for the future.

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . . Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

It would be very easy, I say, to push home these solemn sayings; to show the inconsistency of the ordinary ways of life, and of what we are all doing, with our Master's words: to enlarge upon the separation from the world which may seem to be the only way open of obeying them. Very easy: and some have so heard and understood them that they conceived themselves bound to separate altogether from the common course of life, in which men in general earn their bread, and carry on the business of the world; they could see no point where they could stop, short of giving up all concern with the world, giving up friends and neighbours, wife and children, lands and houses, and every earthly possession, and living as long as God left them to live, without anything that they could call their own, without any employment besides what was directly and immediately and exclusively religious employment. Very easy to bring out from these words the stern and sweeping condemnation of all earthly employment; and, in doing so, to put extreme and strong ways of

speaking into people's mouths, which they satisfied their conscience by repeating with their lips, and dwelling on in their thoughts, while in their daily and real life there was nothing approaching to the way in which they professed to understand our Lord's words.

It would be very easy, I say, to make a very solemn and impressive sermon out of them, simply following and applying the unstrained literal sound; it would be impossible to say anything more sharp and clear about the little business that Christians have with the world than is said in these words. And, on the other hand, it would not be difficult to preach about them in order to show that they have been often misunderstood and misapplied; that they cannot mean that complete separation of Christ's disciples from the business and the employments without which human things would come to a standstill; that they cannot be meant to condemn industry, prudence, the diligent and faithful labouring to get our living in the state of life to which God has been pleased to call us.

As it is easy to preach about them so as to make them mean what seems extreme and extravagant and impossible, so it is equally easy to preach about them, to soften and smooth them down, so as to make them have no meaning at all. But what *is* difficult is to remember that they are the very words of God Himself; for He who spoke them was Almighty God, who made us, who will judge us; and, remembering this, and therefore not daring to take liberties with them, or explain them away, or say that they do not mean what they plainly do,

to apply them, honestly and wisely, to guide our thoughts and our behaviour in a state of life which, we are perfectly certain, it is God's will that we should live.

Jesus Christ, who made men to live together, and to live by their work and their labour, and who so ordered the world that men should have to lay up to-day what would be wanted to-morrow, —sow, in order to reap,—gather in summer-time what would not be given in winter,—Jesus Christ, who appointed and knew all this, spoke these words for the instruction of men, who, He knew, would have to live by their business and by their looking forward. He spoke them for the use and instruction of all generations to the end of time, and not only for those who first heard them, and who had indeed, for our sakes and the Gospel's, literally and entirely to give up their work and business with the world, their families, their homes, their possessions, everything which makes the ordinary employment and ordinary interest of life. To them, indeed, those sharp stern words, "No man can serve two masters," "Take no thought for the morrow," "Take no thought for your life," had the utmost literal meaning which the words could have. For they were called to give up life, and everything else, for the one single object of following their Master in His work of bringing the good news into the world, and setting up His Church, the kingdom of God, among men. For that purpose it was not wonderful that they should have been obliged to give up every other thought and care, when we see that, even now, any great and difficult work which has

to be done requires the same sort of exclusive and entire surrender of every other claim, and devotion of every thought to the great end. He spoke these words in the shape in which they would be most impressive and most striking to those who were first called to be Christians. Unless those words had been realised and fulfilled to the very extreme of their literal meaning, the Gospel never could have made its way; we should have had no Christianity, no universal Christendom of eighteen hundred years, among men. But also, unless the spirit and real principle of those words is kept up among Christians, Christianity will die out among mankind.

But Christ did not mean His Gospel to be always beginning. He did not mean it to be always a time of first introducing His religion to the world. He did not mean it to be always a time of persecution, of wandering missionaries, of martyrs. He meant that the preaching of Apostles should have success; that nations should be converted; that His Gospel should take root, and be established as the religion of mankind; that it should be the mustard seed, at length springing up into the greatest of all herbs; that it should be the leaven which in time should change and fill the whole mass. When the Apostles' work was done, when the Gospel had taken possession of whole nations and their society, when Jesus Christ was recognised as our Lord and Saviour, and His word as the truth by which we were to live and die, it was plain that things could not be as at the beginning. The Gospel work was to be done otherwise than as it had been at a time when no

one believed in it, and all the world was against it. The labours, the wanderings, the entire giving up of all earthly business, all earthly ties, all earthly possessions, which had been necessary in St. Paul and St. Peter and St. John, gave place to another manner of life. Men, when they had learned the great lesson about Christ and everlasting life, were to return to their work and their ordinary employment. The world was still to go on; and it can only go on by men being busy and being provident, by their labouring each at his trade or calling, by their carrying on the business of life, and, as it is called making money. There were still to be different employments, different ranks and stations, among men. There were still to be families and households, husbands and wives, masters and servants. Servants were still to obey their masters on earth, though the Lord had said, "No man can serve two masters." Fathers were still to lay up for their children, though the Lord had said, "Take no thought for the morrow;" for the Lord had not meant to abolish or destroy human society, in which busy employment, hard work, looking forward and preparation for the morrow, are things without which it cannot go on. Our Lord had not meant to abolish labour and business, the good sense and wise care which make life go straight, which give men power to be useful and to do good service in the time of need. He did not mean to destroy and condemn all this: what He meant to do was to fill it all with His heavenly Spirit, to purify, to sanctify, to direct it to its true and right end.

But He did not speak in vain when He said, "No man can serve two masters;" "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;" "Take no thought for the morrow." He did not speak these words merely for those who were to have the hard and painful work of setting up the beginnings of the Church and Gospel of Christ. He spoke them for the Christians of quiet and settled days as much as for those whom He called to walk literally in His footsteps, to drink of His cup, and be baptized with His baptism. And I do not know if they are not, in their living and eternal meaning, more solemn to us, who cannot and are not meant to fulfil them literally, than even to those to whom it was plain and simple enough what they meant. Worldliness was not likely to be the temptation of those who had given up all they had, and were going to die for Christ.

To those who are called to live in a state of things where it is their duty to be busy in the world, to arrange and guide its affairs, to make money, to provide for their families, their wide unlimited meaning, leaving on us the responsibility how far we take in, and live by their true spirit, is like a test and touchstone continually trying what is in their heart, and making proof of the honesty and earnestness of their conscience.

For if they do not call us straight out of this world's business and engagements; if they leave its ordinary course and necessities as they find them; if they say nothing against men doing their work with all their might, fulfilling their obligations with all their ability, throwing their strength and heart

into their employments; if they really leave us to our own responsibility, in laying up for the future, in making money, and providing for our families,—and all sober men will agree that they do all this,—yet they bear witness to certain truths which, be our interest in the world what it may be, are at the foundations of the Christian life. They remind us that the Gospel is a religion which was founded on the sacrifice of all that the world values and makes dear. Sacrifice, sacrifice of self, sacrifice of will, sacrifice of pleasure, sacrifice of hope, was at the bottom of that life and example, of that work of atonement and reconciliation, by which God's kingdom has been opened to us. Say what we will about the necessity and obligation of worldly works and worldly claims, the fact remains that the first step in what was done for our salvation was absolutely to give up this world. And on each thing that was done, on the gradual working out of God's great plan, on each moment and action of our Lord's ministry, on each point of the apostleship of those who took up His commission, sacrifice, the sacrifice of this world, is stamped. If ever we forget that sacrifice, self-denial, the giving up of what flesh and blood would have, the willing surrender of what the Gentiles seek after, is of the foundation and essence of Christ's religion, we forget our Christian profession.

Another thing which those words hold up before our thoughts continually is this: that our religion is one in which this world is absolutely as nothing in comparison with the world to come. It is quite true we are called by God to take our part in the

world and its concerns. For the time we are in it we must work as hard in it and take as much trouble about it as if it was our only and final home. But our home it is not; we are in it, in comparison with what is to come, as players are in a game, compared with the work and business of their whole life. While the game goes on they must do their best, and keep their thoughts on it; but it is but for an hour or two, and then comes what is serious and lasting. And such is our life to that state of things which we call eternity; of which all that we really know is, that it is beyond exception serious and lasting, and that nothing that can happen to us here can be of such consequence as what will happen to us there. The will of God *will* be done, *must* be done, there. No one there can serve two masters; and the time during which it is possible to try is not worth speaking of, considering the time afterwards in which we shall have to take the consequences, and lament the folly of our mistake.

And, again, they remind us that, after all, after all our diligence and labour and prudence,—which, in such a state of things as we live in, the Gospel does not forbid, but commands,—yet, after all, what is the simple truth? Is it not *that* told in the words, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature"? "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." All we do and all we have, our possessions and our plans and our hopes, the world about us and the

days which we are appointed to see,—all is in the hands of Him who feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the grass of the field, and does what He thinks fit with the works and the years of men. In His hands we are. He bids us trust in Him. With all our doing, with all our wisdom, this ever remains at bottom,—that what is His good pleasure, that, and that only, is to come to pass.

Let us read His words with manly, sober, serious hearts; not carelessly, as if Jesus Christ, our Maker and Judge, could have said His most solemn words in vain; not foolishly and perversely, as if He did not know the various generations and different states of society which would have to hear and apply them, and as if His words would have to be explained extravagantly, or turned into a snare; but in faith, that He who spoke the words, who appointed our circumstances, planted in His words eternal truths, fitted in all times to instruct, to warn, and to console us, be our circumstances what they may.

## XXIII

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF FORGETTING GOD

"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful."—ROMANS i. 21.

THE first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans contains the most terrible picture of human sin and degradation that, I suppose, was ever written. There is, as far as I know, no other chapter in the Bible that is so dreadful to read. A darkness and horror seems to come over our minds, seems to clog our words, as we read it. It is not only a description, but a history. It not only tells what human nature had come to be, but the steps by which it had sunk deeper and deeper into the horrors of sin. There is no fine writing—no trouble and art used to dress up the account. Verse after verse rolls on with its increasing burden; but what makes it so terrible to listen to is, that it is nothing more than the plain matter of fact of what men have come to, and why and how they came to it. It is the plain story of what has happened in this world, happened with this race of mankind, who were meant for something so different, who might have been so different. *This* is what they are fallen to; this is what the history

of the world shows. And in this chapter it is summed up with a plain-spoken force and clearness which seem to bring before us the judgment of eternal justice, when, once for all, on the Great Day of Christ, it pronounces the doom of the world.

But now let us try and draw a practical lesson from it. It is, as I said, not only a description of known sin, but a history of the way in which human sin grew up to such a frightful height. Whether or not the same picture could be drawn of the society in which we live now as St. Paul drew of men in his days, there is no doubt at any rate of this: that the same germs and seeds of sin are to be found within it still,—that the same causes are at work to corrupt and degrade, and to lead men on deeper and deeper into evil—nearer and nearer to that frightful state which is described in this chapter. Let us see what were the steps by which men came to be so lost to shame and dead to conscience, to truth, to mercy.

The first step was, that knowing God, "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful." God had made Himself known to them. It matters not *how*, and to what degree. St. Paul here talks of the very world in which we live, making known to us God, its Maker. "That which may be known of God is manifest to men; for God hath made it manifest unto them. For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the works which He hath made (the invisible things of Him, that is), His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

He is speaking of the lowest and least knowledge of God which can be among men; and there is a great difference between such knowledge, the first notion of God, such as the works of creation ought to have taught to a heathen, and that knowledge of Him and of His will which came directly from Him, which is the inheritance of those to whom He has revealed His word. But, wherever this knowledge comes from, or of whatsoever kind it may be, St. Paul is here speaking of such knowledge in itself—more in some and less in others; but, wherever it is, leading men on to draw nigh to God, to glorify Him, and be thankful. And, he says, the first step in the downward course of sin is to know God, and, knowing Him, not to glorify Him, nor to be thankful.

Now let us ask ourselves the truth about this. If God is known in the world, He is known among us. In a sense, we all know Him. We know His greatness and power; we have heard of His righteousness, His goodness, His love. We have all heard of Him at least by the hearing of the ear. His Name is nothing strange to us,—far less strange than it was to the men of other days, whom yet St. Paul declares to be without excuse. And what is God to us? What is He in reality to our thoughts and feelings? Do we own and know Him in our secret souls? Do we acknowledge Him with the eye of faith, as One who, though we see Him not, is over us, is with us, is in us? Is He to us as a real person? Knowing Him as we do, accustomed to the thought of Him all our lives long and every day that we live, does this knowledge make any difference to us in what we think and wish and do? Do

we remember Him in the real work of our life? Do we live differently, because we know Him? Do we "glorify Him as God,"—let Him be the true King of our hearts and desires,—the Master, the Father, whom we wish to please and serve? Knowing what we owe Him, knowing all His benefits to us, knowing all that He has done to redeem and bless us, are we thankful to Him as our God?

Because, see what happened to men before us, who "knowing God," yet knowing Him far less certainly and far less nearly and well than we know Him, yet "glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful." Forgetting Him, living without the belief and remembrance of Him, they fell away into the folly, the vanity, the utter failure and disappointment of those who have nothing but an earthly life to live and an earthly hope to trust to. They "became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Forgetting God, they forgot heaven; forgetting God, they forgot the high and glorious things which man was made for, but which he can only have when he is with God, and God works with him; forgetting God, their hearts and hopes and desires and thoughts fell down to earth, and became of the earth, earthy—childish and vain, and foolish and fruitless. Knowing God, and yet forgetting Him, they lost their guide and measure of what they were meant for, and what they might hope for. Their mind ran on follies; their heart lost its light and became darkened, and could no longer see the things which belonged to its peace.

But that was not all. That was not the worst.

They could not stop, even in this miserable loss of truth and hope. From being fools they went on to be sinners. From wilfully casting behind them the knowledge of God, which was given them to inflame their hearts with His love,—from wilfully forgetting Him, whom all living souls were created to glorify and praise,—it was a short and swift step to rebelling against Him, and setting up evil and falsehood to worship instead of Him. Man must have *some* God to worship and believe in; and if he will not believe in the true one, he cannot stay long without worshipping a false one. So they "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." They "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." They thought it a weary and unprofitable thing to retain in their knowledge and thoughts that High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity, whom no mind can comprehend, no words express, no service of created being fitly praise. And so they fell down to the unutterable madnesses and infatuations of superstition. The living man bowed down to the dead stock and stone, and saw his God in the beast and insect without reason, which his foot could crush.

And *this* was not all either. There was something deeper and darker in degradation yet to come. From forgetting the God they knew, they had come to be drowned in falsehood and vanity and ignorance; they had, like crazed madmen, persuaded themselves that there was more hope and comfort

and advantage in making idols with their own hands than in serving the living God who made the world. "Wherefore"—mark the word, the terrible word, which shows the connexion between the sin and the punishment, which shows what the wrath and judgment of God can bring on those who, having the power to know and do better, dishonour God—"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves. . . . For this cause God gave them up to vile affections. . . . And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;" gave them up to become instances of every conceivable form of sin that is known; gave them up to become at last such sort of men as those "who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

Now here is the state of things to which the world had come when our Lord Jesus Christ came into it to arrest the course of sin and the ruin of the world by once more setting before the eyes of men the form of perfect goodness, and by shedding His blood, that the sin of the world might be washed away in it, and a new world and a new hope begin. Here was the state of things to which the world had come, and for which, if the Son of God had not died, the only remedy was the fire of consuming judgment. This is what it had grown to and blossomed into. And now, what had it all come from? What was the seed from which this crop of sins had

bloomed and thriven, and become so thick and strong? Was it something which has now utterly passed away from the world? or is it something which is in us still?

The beginning of it all, according to the Apostle who speaks the words of the Holy Ghost, the beginning of it was only that forgetfulness of God, as our real living Lord and Father and Judge, which, you know only too well, is a state of mind we all are accustomed to—a state of mind in which many people live on from day to day. Knowing God, and forgetting Him: knowing God, and not glorifying Him as God, and being thankful. It was this, only this, and from this, as from the fruitful and unfailing seed, came to pass in time that monstrous growth of sin which it is frightful and shocking even to read of.

The world is very different in many ways from the world as St. Paul knew it. But the differences are, after all, surface differences—differences in the shape and form of what, at bottom, is the same. Idolatry, superstition, and sin take different appearances, but the same causes run the same course; and wherever there is a knowing God and forgetting Him—a knowing Him and not glorifying Him as God—there is the seed of that idolatry and superstition and degradation of all that is true and pure and good in men, which St. Paul describes. The plague has begun; it may not have got so far—it may be only in its early stage; but the plague has begun, and will go on unless it is checked in time. If you know God and do not own Him in your conscience,—if you know God and do not glorify Him as God, nor are thankful to Him,—you are on the way

to become darkened and blinded, and fast bound in vanity and falsehood. You are on the way to lose the truth; you are on the way to being let alone by God, whose grace alone can save you,—let alone to do those things "which are not convenient." Oh, who can tell where that may bring a man? Who can tell where that dark, slippery, downward road may end which begins in simply forgetting God, not owning as Lord over our life the God whom yet we know full well?

Take warning: take warning from the Apostle's words—words which we could hardly dare read anywhere except in the presence of the God of holiness; and remember that the whole history of mankind, with its terrible experiences, bears them out and confirms them. Let us tremble when we find ourselves trifling with the thought and fear of God. Let us fall on our knees and beseech Him to save and help us, and give us light and life, when we find that we are forgetting Him, living without Him in the world; knowing Him, yet not glorifying Him as God; knowing Him, yet not liking to retain Him in our knowledge.

## XXIV

## THE CONVENIENT SEASON

"When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."—
ACTS xxiv. 25.

MOST of you know the occasion of this famous answer. Felix, the Roman governor, made it to St. Paul, who had been talking to him of religion: and when Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." The words, as I said, have become famous. They have passed into a kind of proverb, when we want to signify the self-deceit with which we put off what we are afraid of, and do not like, but yet cannot altogether resist and deny. Felix felt the truth of what St. Paul said: he felt it so much that it made him tremble. A powerful ruler, and master of St. Paul's life, and able with a word to put him to death, yet he was afraid of him. He was a bad man, and could not hear of the righteousness and temperance which he had set at naught, and of the judgment which his conscience told him *must* come, without alarm and distress. He could not shut his eyes to the fact that he stood in serious danger: he felt convinced in his secret heart that what St. Paul said was the truth. But he soothed

his conscience by saying that he would think of his words another time. Now it was not "convenient." There are all kinds of reasons why an unrighteous and unjust man finds it, at the moment, inconvenient to learn and follow righteousness—why the sinner and ungodly finds it inconvenient to look in the face the tremendous certainty that he is one day to answer before the judgment-seat of God. But perhaps a time might come when it would be convenient. Felix would wait till then, and in the meanwhile go on as usual. The looking forward to the fancied convenient season kept his conscience satisfied and cheated for the present. He even seems to have liked to hear St. Paul; he was able, in spite of his trembling, to find pleasure in listening to words which were his own condemnation: he sent for Paul often, we are told, "and communed with him." But the time when God awakened his fears and made him think seriously what he was, and where he was going to,—that time had passed away unavailingly. We have no reason to think that Felix ever repented.

And that convenient season, in which Felix, to his own ruin, cheated himself into believing—how many of us believe in too. It is the great delusion which cheats us all more or less; which has gone on cheating men from the beginning of the world; which has been warned against, and preached against, and found by universal experience to be the most lying of delusions; but which is yet, and will continue to be to the end, as strong as ever. What is it that enables us to listen unmoved to things which we know to be true, and, if true, most terribly im-

portant to us, but the convenient season, which never comes? How is it that people can hear the things that they hear, Sunday after Sunday, in church—things which, so far from denying or contradicting, they *like* to hear,—they would be uncomfortable not to hear,—how is it that they can hear them, and agree with them, and yet still go on living as if they were mere words and meant nothing,—if it were not for that other time which they trust to find, when they will attend to them in earnest? How is it that the words of God are received as most true, and yet produce no effect on the hearts and lives of those who receive them, except that they are able, while they hear them, to fancy to themselves a time when it will suit them not only to agree with them, but actually to put them in practice,—a time when they please themselves with thinking that all those beautiful and striking things which they hear in God's Word, and which even now, while they do the opposite, still seem so taking, so much to be wished for, so fit to make them happy, shall be really felt, and seen, and worked out, in their own lives: a time when they shall pray in earnest, though they do not care about praying now; a time when they shall be gentle and loving, and heavenly-minded and pure, whatever to the contrary they may be now? What is it which enables them to bear the reproaches of their own conscience, the conviction of religious truth, the calls and visitations of God's providence, but that they can manage to persuade themselves that they can let the whole matter stand over to another day, when they will be more in the mind to think about

it, more free from what tempts them than they are now, with more time to give to it, with less business and trouble to interrupt them?.

It is not open refusal to believe and obey the Gospel which is so dangerous among us; it is not the corrupting it, the excuses by which men make what is false seem true and what is wrong seem right. These, no doubt, are dangers; but the great danger of all is seeming to agree with the truth, and to be persuaded by it, and putting off to another day the really attending to it. We listen, perhaps sometimes we tremble; but we think that a more convenient season will come in time, and that we may wait till then before we begin to change our ways in earnest. And *when* do those who trust to it find that the convenient season ever comes?

There is really no greater practical snare than the putting off religious duty until another day. We do not want the Bible to warn us against its folly. Its warnings are striking enough against leaving such things to the last, against leaving them to another day at all when we are called to think of them to-day. You remember the foolish virgins finding it too late to enter in; the guests, called to the feast, and choosing rather to look after their worldly interests, and thus shut out from the kingdom of God; the people whom Christ called, and who wanted first to attend to their friends and business, and with whom Christ would allow no delay. But we do not want such warnings to show us what risks we are running, and how plainly we are deceiving ourselves. Our own experience is enough. There are people who are given to putting off and waiting

till another time, not only in religious matters but in matters of this world. Well, what do we think of a man of this sort? a putter-off, who leaves till to-morrow what he ought to do to-day, whose common way it is to wait for a more convenient season, whose way of getting out of something that is troublesome, or that he does not like, is to leave it to another day? Your worldly wisdom tells you that when a man has once got into this way of putting off, there is no depending on him; that he goes on amusing himself, and dreaming, and looking forward, but that it is little use hoping that he will bring anything to perfection. You know that he is not a man to get on, or to succeed in what he takes in hand. You know that his plans are likely to come to naught, that the convenient day to which he is ever looking forward never comes, and never will come, as long as he goes on cheating himself in this way of waiting for it. You know that the secret of it all is that he is lazy and indolent, and dislikes the work which he has to do. You see through and smile at his excuses for trying to put off a difficulty which he is afraid to face. You smile when he thinks he is making you believe that he is in earnest when he puts off something, and you remember how often he has put off and waited for a more convenient season before. You find no difficulty in taking the measure of such idle putting off things in matters of this world, in the dealings between man and man. Well, then, you have the character, as it appears in God's eyes, and as it is in truth, of so many who are putting off the day of repentance and earnest religion to a more convenient season; who are leaving the

peace of their souls, and the preparing them for death and judgment and eternity, to the last; who think that they need not be in a hurry in doing those things which yet they hope to do sometime or other before they die. You see how such a character looks in the world. Can you suppose that it can look any better in the eyes of God as respects the most solemn things that man can have to do with? Can anything good come from such idle looking forward in religion any more than in business? Is it at all more likely that the convenient season, always waited for and never found, will at last be reached by these putters off of repentance, any more than it is by the putters off of necessary work in their earthly callings? If it is the mark of a man who cannot be depended on, who will not do any good in his work, that he sees what he ought to do, and is always meaning to do it, but never can find the convenient time, what can we hope that this same spirit will ever bring us to in religion? Can we, when we think for a moment, really believe that going on in this way we *ever shall* find the time to which we are looking forward? Can we help seeing that what makes people put off in worldly business and put off in religion is exactly the same thing, namely, a dislike to what has to be done, and that the dislike is not likely to become less by this waiting for a more convenient season?

We can see, too, what has come of this putting off of religion in our past lives. If we will but remember, we shall see plainly enough how, a few years back, we were doing just as we are now. We were feeling the truth of religion. We were promis-

ing to ourselves that we would change our ways—only, not just yet, not at this very moment, which would be so inconvenient, but at some time, soon perhaps—at any rate a better time than just now. Years have gone over us since then. Have we found the fitting time? Has the convenient season come yet? Has the change begun which we were looking forward to, perhaps counting on for certain, then? Are we the same, or different from what we were then? Year after year has gone, summer and winter have brought their changes; but, among them all, the convenient moment for changing our lives, for giving more heed to the Bible, for thinking more of eternal things,—that long looked-for moment,—has not yet arrived. Still we are looking forward to it. Still we gladly listen to God's words and warnings; still we feel them to be the words of life. Still we wish that we followed them more. Still we hope one day to find them our portion. But still we are waiting for the convenient season. Still we are putting off the time of real examination of our lives and condition in God's sight. Still we are not yet preparing ourselves to die. Still we are the same sort of people we were when, years back, we were looking forward to the time when we could conveniently begin to say our prayers more regularly and carefully, to be more constant at church, to come to the Holy Sacrament; the same sort of people as then, when we were purposing to do what, in fact, we never have done; too good to give up our hope, our intention to obey God's word and commandments, but not enough in earnest to make the change at once which we know must be made some time if

we are to be saved; to deny ourselves in order to obey God better, to force ourselves to begin the great work of life, the getting ready for what is to meet us after death. That is—if we look back on our lives during their late years—that is what has in fact come to many of us from putting off and waiting for a more convenient season. Things are as they were. Nothing has been begun in the way of improvement. The convenient season has seemed always near, yet has never been reached; it has fled before us like our shadow, but we have never got hold of it.

Shall we never reach it? Not if we go on for ever looking forward to it, and in the meantime doing nothing. The convenient season will never come if we are for ever passing by the season which now is because it is not as convenient as we wish. It will never come if we are for ever to leave till to-morrow what we may do to-day, if we cheat ourselves by thinking that it will be easier to do next week, or next Christmas, or next Easter, what we think hard and are not inclined to do now. The easier time is not the time when things that have been long neglected have at last to be made up for. The easier time for paying a debt is not (though so many deceive themselves by thinking so) when it has mounted up by being put off, and we are grown older. The easier time for getting through a serious and important work is not when, by being left untouched for years, there is more to do to it, and we have not grown stronger and more fit for trouble. And the easier time to turn to God, to break the chain of sin, to change to a better life, to begin to make trial of Gospel obedience, is not when years

have stiffened us in our way of life, when we have got accustomed to thoughts and ways which are only of this world, when the mind begins to flag, and the body to droop, and we begin to find that we have already worked out the best of our health and strength.

Is it *ever* so easy to change from anything that we have been accustomed to, that we should venture to think that a distant day will be more convenient than now to do what we know we ought to do, but have not been accustomed to as yet? You know how little a matter, different from what you are accustomed to, makes you uncomfortable; a change of house, a change of persons about you, a change in the way of doing what you have done in the same way for many years: you find these unpleasant, and the more so the older you get. Then, if you are not accustomed *now* to religious thoughts and principles and ways, can you suppose that some time hence you will find some method, some contrivance, by which, when it is convenient, you will become accustomed and reconciled to them? If you are putting off saying your prayers regularly because it is not convenient now, do you really think that the time will come when it will be made easy and natural for you to say them? If you are still putting off, as so many have been putting off for years, what yet you acknowledge to be a Christian's bounden duty, the coming to God's Holy Table, can you really expect that anything will happen to you which, somehow or other, will be the opportunity you cannot find now of drawing near to that blessed Communion? Have you not had trial of yourself? Chances, as we call

them, have come, and touched you for the time, and gone. They might have helped you, but they did not seem to help you as much as you required,—you missed them, and they are passed away. You have had a serious talk; you have heard a sermon which impressed you; you began to think that now you would make up your mind and come, but you had not the heart—the opportunity passed, and you have not come. Perhaps you were sick, and looked forward that if you were raised up again you would make the effort to obey your Saviour's call, and seek His blessing. You got well, you returned to your work, but you have not come. Well, then, judging by the past, can you really expect that your future condition will ever in any way seem to you more convenient for coming to the Holy Table than your present condition seems to you now?

No, my brethren. It must be *in yourself* that the change must be. It must be you yourself and not outward things, sickness, or calls, or impressions from others, which is to make the step and fulfil the duty. It is you who must *make* the opportunity, not wait for it; or rather, I will say that God will most surely give you the opportunity, but you must seize it for yourself. You must make the convenient season, and make that convenient, which is the only season you can make sure of, the present. And be sure that there is no truer word in the world than this, that he who waits for the convenient season in matters of duty will never find it.

You know the folly of leaving things to the last in matters of this life. Words are not enough for you to express your scorn of the stupidity, the miser-

able weakness, of those who in any matter, be it only in starting for a journey or doing some common household service, leave things to the last; much more when the matter is a high and important one. Will you laugh at and scorn men for leaving things to the last in their worldly concerns, and will you leave things to the last when the everlasting destiny of your soul is concerned?

Men have two short words by way of excusing themselves when they are warned to think of God. "Not now," they say; "it will be soon enough by and by." And God has two short words, too, to set against them, which He is making good each day that we live—who can tell how awfully? To man's "not yet," God's answer is, "then, never." To man's "soon enough," He answers, "too late."

## XXV

## GOD'S ALL-SEEING EYE

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."—HEBREWS iv. 13.

THERE are some things in religion which are among its plainest and most familiar teachings, but which yet, when we come to think what they really mean, seem almost too awful and tremendous to be endured by the mind of man. Among these, is the truth that the eye of God is always upon us. The Bible everywhere takes it for granted, and appeals to it. "Thou God seest me." "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, and upon them that put their trust in His mercy." And, as it is said in the 139th Psalm, which is all about it, "Thou hast searched me out and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. . . . Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. . . . Whither shall I go then from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I go then from Thy presence?" All this is manifestly the plain and simple truth. It could not be otherwise. Almighty God must behold all we

do, and know all we think. It is as certain that God must see us as it is certain that God made us. We must be ever before His eyes, because He is God who made all things to be, and without whom all things would cease to be. It is a thought which it is impossible to get rid of; for the moment we think of God at all, it comes with the thought of Him.

And yet, as soon as we begin to say to ourselves, "What does it mean, what does it come to?—how does it touch me, and my life and thoughts?"—how unspeakably awful does it become! To what terrible greatness and meaning does it swell out, just in proportion as we get hold of all that there is in the simple, well-known words, God sees me always.

God sees me always. It must be so, it must be true. Then how awful is the very difficulty which I feel in getting myself really to believe and feel as if it was so! Here I am, standing before His all-seeing eye, never out of its sight, never for an instant hidden; and yet to think that I can hardly, by trying, get myself to feel that it is so! How awful that even when I am on my knees, and speaking words of prayer to Him, I yet so often fail to remember that He is listening,—that He knows what I am saying, and whether I am thinking of Him or not.

God sees me always. Then, to think of all that He knows of me, of all that He has seen; I, who should fear to let my best friend know all that I am; I, who cannot bear to think of the secrets of my heart being broken into by man; I, who claim

to have a life of my own, privileged and reserved for myself alone, into which no prying eye from without may enter; I, perhaps, who take so much trouble to keep up appearances, and to keep out of sight what, I feel in myself, will least bear the light; to know that all this secrecy and pains are vain,—that all that I am is known to Him who takes the measure of us all. The world may not know it, but it is all "naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

God sees me always. And then to think of the things which I have done without remembering that He was looking on; to compare the number of times when I *have* remembered that He was seeing me, with the number of times that He was utterly out of my thoughts and recollections; to think how differently I should often have spoken, if I had only had it in my mind that He observed me, and knew what I was saying; to think, I say, not only of all that He has seen, but of all the times when I entirely forgot that He was by! To think of the vain devices and pretences by which I excused myself to myself, and hid from myself something which I did not like to see and acknowledge to myself. And then to think how all this must have looked in the eyes of One who saw through it all; what He must have thought of me, how I must have been put to shame in His presence; how He must have despised me, for the vain fool that I was. Is there any one of us who can steadily fix his thoughts on the simple words, "God sees me always," and who in proportion as the meaning of them opens on him, can help having some such feelings as these?

It is naturally difficult to us to keep in mind things that we never see; and, of course, there are many other reasons which make us not care to keep this thought in our minds. Those who like to do what God hates, naturally do not like to retain God in their knowledge, or to torment themselves with the perpetual remembrance that He is seeing what they do. They will forget it as long as they can, and will keep their eyes shut to His presence till they cannot help opening them. But there are many who feel their weakness and sin, and yet wish to do better, who do not like to let their thoughts dwell steadily on this great and real thing, that they are ever under the eyes of God. They shrink, because they feel that it is so certainly and unavoidably true, and because they feel, too, that they are not fit to bear such watching, or able to endure the thought of it. It is in itself so awful, that it seems easier and more comfortable to get rid of it by forgetting and shutting our eyes, and letting the world blot it out of our minds, than to face it, with the consciousness of an utter weakness and utter unfitness to be observed all day long by the pure eyes of the most Holy God. And so, many people, without the direct and deliberate meaning to do wrong, keep the thought out of their minds, or, what is almost the same thing, take no trouble to keep it *in* their minds. For, certain and plain and true as it is beyond a moment's doubt, it is, without question, one of those thoughts which will go out of minds like ours of itself, unless we hold it fast. Go out of them, at any rate, for a season; for no one can tell in what terrible strength

and unbearable vividness it may return, when we least expect it.

But let us consider this. In the first place, we all know that if there is anything true in the world, it is that Almighty God, who made us and keeps us alive, must see and know all that we are, and all that we do. What is the good then' of fighting against what is so certainly true? What is the use of stiffening and hardening ourselves against what all our wishing and all our thinking will not make otherwise? What is the use of accustoming ourselves to dream that something is *one* way when all the time we know it is *another* way?

We ought to learn to live all day in the thought that God's eye is upon us, if for no other reason, at any rate for this one,—that this is the truth; that it is the real condition under which we must live, and that we cannot change it, or run away from it. "If I climb up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down to hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost part of the sea; even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned into day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with Thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to Thee are both alike." There is no escape from the truth; and why should we vainly try to escape from it?

But, in the next place, consider this. The thought of God's eye upon us is generally looked upon as a thought to restrain and bridle us in, with the fear of His awful strictness and holiness of

judgment. And so, of course, it is. It is a terrible thought to have hanging over us when we are inclined to do wrong, and to play with sin. But is this all? Does that awful eye of God, ever fixed upon us, speak only of severity, of warning, of reproof? Is it fixed on us only to condemn us, only to make us feel our infinite distance from Him who is our Father and God; only to make us shrink and tremble before Him? Is this the reason why you are afraid to face the thought of God's continual knowledge of you, that you find in it only what disquiets and presses down your soul? I believe it is the reason very often; and so, in our cowardice, and with our slavish love of forbidden things, we miss what is surely meant, not merely to restrain us, but to be the greatest of our comforts. For if the thought of God seeing us, and knowing us through and through, to our hearts' depths, is a very awful one, it is one on which, if we really take it in, we can stay and rest with hope, and encourage ourselves, as we can on nothing else.

If there is any truth whatever in man, God also is truth itself, and it is to God that he can look up, to be sure that the truth about him is fully known. He knows that God sees him just as he is; that it is no use to hide his sin and unprofitableness and falls; but also that God sees too every step, every effort, which he makes in trying to do better. We live in a fool's dream about ourselves, and it is not the outside world only, but our own imaginations and judgments about ourselves, which we cannot help feeling convinced, from time to time, are utterly wrong and mistaken. It seems to me that it is a

great comfort to be able to fall back on the thought that there is One who knows us really, knows us without mistake; who has no temptation to misunderstand or misrepresent us; no temptation to think us better, nor yet to think us worse, than we are; who judges us, justly indeed—oh, how awfully justly—and yet makes every allowance, with the continual desire to help us, tenderly and lovingly watching over us, and caring for us. Surely this is a thought to retire into for refuge, not only from the "provoking of all men," and "the strife of tongues," but from our own perplexities and doubts about ourselves,—our own questionings and uncertainties whether, after all, we are in the right way; whether our wishes and attempts to do right are not all useless and thrown away.

For we are what we are in God's sight; not what men think us, not what we think ourselves, but what He sees and knows that we are—nothing more, nothing less. There is One to whom we can always reveal our cause, knowing that it will be perfectly understood and fairly weighed. To His absolute and perfect knowledge we can make our appeal, even if we can only make it with shame and self-reproach and bitter abasement. In the certainty that He knows all our case, we can find comfort, even above that of the testimony of a good conscience; when feeling that our heart does not condemn us, we can lift up our thoughts with confidence to God, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.

We are ever in God's sight. Let us not dread it as cowards and slaves now, only to be overwhelmed

by it in that judgment which must surely one day come; but let us learn, awful as it is, to welcome the thought, and make it real to ourselves; to believe in it, to face it steadily as often as we can. And so shall we find it, what it is meant to be,—God's great encouragement and help to His creatures and His children in doing right. *There* is His eye—not of a Judge and Ruler only, but of a Shepherd, a Father, a Giver of all good gifts, a Promiser of all blessed hopes, the Lover of the souls of men, even to the not sparing His only Son for them. So shall we find something to rest upon—a sure and true and just judgment, to fall back upon, in the difficulties, the temptations, the mistakes of our lives; a judgment which it is hopeless to imagine deceived by any show on our part, but which is sure to give us credit for all that is good and faithful and honest. So, in pain, in sorrow, in those bitter times which seem to shut out all remaining hope to us while we are here, we shall know and feel that we are being watched by an eye of tenderness and sympathy, deeper and truer than that of any friend on earth to his suffering friend. So shall we come to feel that, unseen though it is, in the brightness of the sky or the darkness of the night, there is an eye which meets ours when we turn to it for support and guidance. "I will inform and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go: and I will guide thee with mine eye." So, whenever we will, whenever we want it to help us, to reassure us, to give us hope, we shall have that constant presence to appeal to, whom none can really doubt, none can hope to deceive; to appeal to in our prayers, even when they are miserably cold and

wandering; to appeal to in our striving against evil and temptation; to appeal to when we are by ourselves, and dare not trust our suffering thoughts to any one; when perhaps we do not know the cause of our trouble.

So may we prepare ourselves, by the continual thought of His never-ceasing though invisible nearness to us now, for that day when our eyes shall be unsealed; and He, who has all along been walking unnoticed at our side, will be manifested to us "as He is,"—"that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

## XXVI

## THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY AS MAN TO MAN

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."—ST. LUKE vi. 36-38.

OUR Lord sets before us, in these words, two things: the pattern of mercy, of justice, of forbearance and forgiveness, of generosity, which we ought to take; which is the example of Almighty God,—"be ye *therefore* merciful," because, as it is said in the verse before, "the Highest," of whom we call ourselves the children, "is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil:"—and next, the rule of God's government and judgment in matters between man and man; "with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Thus we see that, for the present, God is to us all, even to the unthankful and to the evil, what He would have *us* also to be: He is merciful, He is gracious, He spares, He condemns not, He forgives, He gives to us all "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over."

But this is only true for the time that we are here on our trial, preparing for the other life. Between this life and that other life comes the day of judgment, when we must give up an account for this life, and receive the things done in the body. And of this judgment this is one of the great rules: with what measure men have measured to others, it shall be measured to them again. Mercy will follow mercy, and he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy. By the rule by which we have judged and condemned shall we, in our turn, be tried. There can be no looking for forgiveness, if forgiveness has on our part been denied. And, according as we have shared our Father's bountiful gifts with our brethren, will our Father's bounty be poured upon us in infinite increase; or else be restrained, withheld, taken from us for ever.

We all know that the great practical rule of life, that in which the meaning of God's law about our duty to our neighbour is summed up,—the second of the two great commandments,—is, that we should do to all men as we would that they should do to us. And, answering to this great rule of duty, is God's great rule of judgment and recompense. As we have done to others, so, in the end, shall it be done to us. This, which our own consciences and feelings bid us to expect from a God of righteousness, God's word to us, by His Son our Lord, and by His Prophets and Apostles, fully confirms. In all things as we sow, so shall we reap.

And in our behaviour to other people, and our treatment of them,—not only in our deeds to them, but in our judgments and words about them,—we

must expect nothing more from our great Judge than what we have been willing to give to them. We are now choosing the rule by which we shall be dealt with by and by; the rule of just severity, of which we little know yet the tremendous meaning and searching righteousness; the rule of forgiveness, of allowance, of compassionate love, of which we cannot measure or imagine the depths and treasures of mercy.

God, who has planted this law of His kingdom deep in our nature, has again solemnly declared it by the voice of Jesus Christ: the law of being done to, as we did to others. "With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured back to you in return."

My brethren, I do not know with what feelings you hear these well-known familiar words, but to me they always seem some of the most awful words in the Bible. For, in the first place, they are so plainly the words of that justice which all men acknowledge, that we not only believe, but we *feel*, that they must be true. They are not a matter of faith to us, which we receive on the authority of God. The moment we trust ourselves to think at all of the matter, we feel sure that so it must be; we cannot help seeing that it could not be otherwise; we cannot, if we would, doubt them, if we believe in a judgment at all. In that judgment men must look to be dealt with in the same spirit, by the same measures, according to the truth and righteousness and generosity which they have shown when it was their turn to be the judges, when it was their turn to show mercy, to pass their opinion, to help and share and give. Can we

imagine any one claiming to be judged by a different measure? Can we imagine that the forgiveness, the allowances, that they would not grant to others, they may count upon for themselves? Can they imagine that they may deal with men harshly, but that God ought to deal with themselves tenderly?

This is one thing which makes these words so awful, that we see for ourselves that it *must* be as they say. And the other is that, while we feel the certainty of the law and judgment, we cannot see or guess *how* it will be carried out. It lies in the awful darkness of the time to come; and there, in due time, in ways that we know not, at a moment which none can tell, the sentence will have its effect, the measure will be measured back. All we know is that, some time or other, a man's deeds will be returned upon him, and he will find out how he dealt with his brethren, and what God, his Maker and Judge, thought of his dealings, by what happens to himself.

And the fearful thing to think of is that, for the most part, this is to be in another world,—another world, where all things will be different,—another world, where all things will be so much greater, for blessedness and for anguish, than they are here,—another world, where what is to be is to be for good, and for ever. It is there, for the most part, that the law, which cannot be broken, will have its fulfilment, and the measure be measured back to men. Here it only is so partially and sometimes. It *is* so sufficiently to awaken our thoughts and fears. We do see, from time to time, strange and sudden instances of a man being overtaken by a trouble and humilia-

tion, answering in a wonderful manner to his own manifest wrongdoings, and rolling back on his own head that same measure which he had measured to others. And do we not, in our own consciences, sometimes trace dimly with surprise and awe, in the things which God's providence brings upon us, in the trials which are become the accustomed portion of our life, and meet us daily, the very likeness to those things which, long ago, were the sins and offences of our lives?

Men see, in the harshness and looseness of the unfair judgments passed on them, the reflection and likeness of the judgments which they once so carelessly uttered. Men see, in the disappointment and unkindness of their own children, the remembrance of what their own parents once had to grieve over in them. These things do happen. The awful rule of the measure measured back does show itself in our real life and experience here, partially, though often with overwhelming force and evidence. But it is only partially for this world. This life is a life of preparation, of waiting, of grace, of possible repentance and change and amendment. The rule is put off here, because here all things are imperfect and but for a time, and of very short continuance. We do not see it fulfilled here. If we only judged by this life, it would seem to be sometimes fulfilled and acted on, but more often not. Where it is to be fulfilled and accomplished completely and universally, is in that unknown world to come, to which we are all hastening.

But whether here or there, this is the rule of God's government; this is the rule by which we shall all

have our lives and doings tried and judged. "With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured back to you in return." That is the clear plain rule.

If a man wants to know how his life, with all its imperfections and inconsistencies, and weaknesses and sins, will be dealt with, let him first consider with himself how, in serious business and disputes, and, still more, how, in the common talk of life, he has been in the habit of judging others. What has he shown of care and anxiety and trouble to be fair, really to do justice to another man's case, to know the whole truth, to make no charge before he was sure, to keep from all malice and ill-nature, to make allowances, to pay regard to the rights and feelings of others, to guard against harshness, violence, passion, and bad temper?

We must, all of us, judge often, and sometimes condemn. We must sometimes condemn with unshrinking severity. The harm and sin is not in judging and condemning, but in judging and condemning without reason,—carelessly, unjustly, ignorantly,—condemning for the pleasure of condemning, condemning without mercy and without fear. Now, if our conscience tells us that we have dealt this measure to others, we have here before us the announcement of what we have to look for. What we have refused to others will be refused to us. If we have taken judgment and condemnation into our hands needlessly and harshly, there is the same harsh and unsparing judgment waiting for us. If we, who need so much indulgent allowance for ourselves, made none for others, it is vain to look for it

when we are judged. If we have made the worst of things against others, we know that things will not be made the best of for us.

Is there any one who can look back on all his past life, and venture to say that he could endure the judgment, if the measure which he knows he has measured to others were, in God's justice, exactly measured back to him? Yet that is God's rule; the rule we must stand or fall by; the rule from which there is no escape. Can we hear the rule and doubt it,—doubt of its fairness, doubt of its certainty? Can we hear the rule and not tremble?

If there were nothing else to drive us to take refuge in God's offers of mercy in Christ, surely this alone would be enough. To be done to, by the infinite and perfect justice of God, as we have done to others so often and so carelessly—who could stand it? What hope is there for us, but that great mercy and patience and forgivingness of our heavenly Father, which we care so little to copy? If we can venture to look forward to that day of trial, surely it must be with the hope that what we have so justly and righteously deserved may, for the sake of Him who died for us, be after all *not* meted out to us. It must be with the hope that we, who have so often refused to forgive, may be forgiven our unforgivingness, which we have confessed and repented of at God's mercy-seat before the great account was closed. It must be with the hope that we, who have so often judged so lightly and condemned so harshly, may, now that we see and are sorry for our harsh judgments, yet find, for Christ's sake and goodness, a mercy which we once would not show.

If, I repeat, there were nothing else, this alone ought to bring us to earnest and serious thoughts; that, for our past dealings with our brethren, there is nothing but true repentance to save us from being dealt with exactly by the same measure which we dealt to them.

Let us live with the remembrance of this awful truth about the justice of God. God repays to men what they do. God measures back to them by their own rule. God judges them by the standard they apply to their brethren. Then, if we feel ourselves getting slack in our obedience and careless in our repentance, let us ask ourselves how we can look forward to facing it if we neglect the promises and grace of Christ to offending men, whom the law condemns. Let us beseech Him not to enter into judgment with us who never can be justified in His sight. Let us believe with thankfulness that there *is* mercy with Him, even for those who have sinned against mercy; but let us also believe, as is most true, that it is only for those who *now* desire and try to be merciful,—who try not to provoke God by judging carelessly and unjustly,—who fear when they condemn lest they should be condemned; who, in the hope of God's forgiveness, are ready with all their heart to forgive their brother; who, in the hope and knowledge of God's unmeasured goodness, are glad to follow the example of their Father in heaven.

May God help us all to share in the spirit and mind of His Son, that we may hope for the "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over," which His Son has to give to those who love Him.

## XXVII

## THE UNJUST STEWARD

"And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."—ST. LUKE xvi. 8.

"THE children of this world:" that is, the people who plainly and entirely live for this world alone, and do not care, or profess to care, for anything beyond it. "The children of light:" that is, those whom God's grace and calling has enlightened and drawn to the light of goodness and truth; whose hearts and consciences feel and acknowledge what is right and lovely and of good report; and who in various measures try to follow it,—wish to be on the right side and in God's favour,—hope in the end to attain by His mercy to the light of His countenance and the blessedness of His kingdom. And the lesson which our Lord means to teach by the remarkable story of the unjust steward,—the dishonest servant who did his evil work thoroughly; and, having begun by cheating his master, and not being willing to repent and do better, did not stop half-way, but carried out his cheating to the last, and made the most of it as a provision against the evil day;—the lesson, for the sake of which our Lord is not afraid to represent the master as praising the unjust

steward, because he had done wisely, is this, that the men of this world, in the sense which they show, and in the thoroughness and consistency with which they live for the world, outstrip and put to shame the men with consciences.

That was the general sight when our Lord was among us: it was never different before He came, and has never been different since. The world is served more perfectly, more wisely, more successfully, than God. Men think, and look forward, and take trouble, and even suffer for the world, in a way in which they will not think and act and suffer for the sake of the world to come. The children of this world do their work with a whole heart; the children of light do theirs with only half a heart.

"In their generation," with a view to the object for which they choose to live and work, "the children of this world are wiser than the children of light." They are wiser, more prudent and sensible, in what they do, because they are more in earnest in what they want, and use the proper means to gain it. If the unjust steward wants still to enjoy himself, and to have friends to receive him into their houses, he knows that he must think beforehand of the most likely way to gain his end; and when he has thought of the means, he must use them. He knows that he will never reach what he wants by dreaming about it, or wishing it, or talking about it, or beginning and then drawing back. Bad man as he is, he has no thought of such folly.

Yet this is the way in which "the children of light" seem to think that they may gain their ends; may fulfil the will of God and please Him in their

lives; may gain the witness of a good conscience, and the peace of a holy life, and the sure and blessed hope of the rest which is prepared for God's children. The children of light are not in earnest in the way in which the children of the world are in thorough earnest.

There are two points worth noticing in that wisdom of the unjust steward for which his master commended him,—in that wisdom of this world, which is indeed folly and vanity as regards the things worth living for, but which, so far as it goes, and for its own purposes, is to be seen on all sides of us, steadily successful, and obtaining all that it seeks after. One is, that the unjust steward had the sense to look forward. The evil day, he knew, must come; the day when, unless he had something wherewith to meet it, things would go hardly with him. He knew it was no good shutting his eyes and wishing and hoping that it would not come. He knew that it was before him, and he must meet it. So he faced it. He did not try weakly and foolishly to escape from what cannot be escaped from. But he knew that he had certain means of preparing for it. He had time still; he had that knowledge of the business of his master's debtors and their affairs that gave him the opportunity of doing something for himself before the evil day came.

We are not talking, as the parable does not talk, of the right and wrong of what he did. The point is, that there were certain things to be done, and he did them. He had the sense to look forward and make ready, and do what his sort of wisdom taught him to do, beforehand—before the day of evil overtook him.

In the next place, he went through with what he had begun. Wicked and unscrupulous at first, he was wicked and unscrupulous to the end. A less bad man might have seen his fault, and repented of it, and taken the consequences, ruin and beggary, as the just punishment of it. A weaker man would have been frightened, and faltered, and hesitated, and have been afraid to go on in the bold bad path he had entered on. He would have been cowed at having been found out. He might have wished still to cheat, but he would have been afraid of what might come of it if he were found out; afraid lest he should provoke his master further. He would have gone backwards and forwards, willing to do wrong, and yet not wholly daring.

But the unjust steward saw that, to save himself at all, he must act boldly. Nothing could be gained by being a coward, and shrinking from using the opportunity which lay open to him. He had had no scruples about cheating his master before, and he had no difficulty about it now. He was consistent; he would not lose the fruit of his past life by giving way to discouragement, or shrinking from the courses which he had followed.

So does wickedness; in the resolute earnestness with which it follows its bad ends, in the trouble it takes about them, in the risks that it is willing to venture for them, in the forethought and patience with which it compasses them, in the thorough and complete mind with which it sticks to them, it rebukes and shames the coldness, the half-heartedness, the cowardice, with which most of us serve our Master, and follow religion and goodness. Alike in the

worldly-wise idolaters of mammon, who astonish us by their success and prosperity, and in the daring criminals who venture too far, and whose craft and boldness cannot save them from their fate, we see the counterpart of the scheming of the unjust steward; of his courage in looking forward and facing the day of difficulty and trial; of his steady perseverance in the path which he had chosen.

In them there is no going backwards and forwards, at one time wishing to do right, at another time swept away by temptation. In them there is no having only half a mind to what they do. In them there is no being frightened by trouble and difficulty. In them there is no being afraid to go through consistently with what they have begun. Those who have made up their minds to do wrong know that this kind of hesitating foolishness will not succeed in the world. They take care to avoid it. It is left to those who have made up their minds to try to do right. If only the good were as good, as thorough-going and resolute in their goodness, as the bad are bad, the world would be a very different one; the cause of the kingdom of God, of right and truth, would be winning its victories in a very different measure.

This is our Lord's solemn lesson to those who, in whatever degree, may hope to claim the name of "children of light." What goes on in the world, what succeeds in the world, is a rebuke and condemnation to them. Nay, their own pains and trouble, their own careful thought for the future, their own wise management of their worldly business, their own spirit and courage, their own industry

and perseverance, their own success, condemn their feebleness, their ill-success, the poorness of their attempts in what they do as the servants of the God of holiness and everlasting life.

Take the two points which I mentioned in the case of the unjust steward: his looking forward to the day of trial and difficulty, and his steady, unflinching, thorough carrying out of the unscrupulous manner of life which he had chosen. Compare that with the way in which we so often act as regards the claims of God and the next world, as regards our duty and the principles which we profess. As to looking forward—how little does that come into the common ordering of our lives. We know that we have to be prepared. It is the very thing for which we believe that we are on earth. We are here to be prepared, to be ready for something. We have to be prepared for trials and temptations which may meet us; sickness, pain, losses; the breaking up of all that makes life happy. We have to be prepared for occasions which may try our principles, whether they are sound, or only fair on the outside; our honesty, our tempers, our unselfishness,—who knows how our souls and spirits may be tried? We only know how terribly men have been tried in this world, and *are* being tried every day.

At any rate we have to be prepared for the awful day from which there is no escape; we have to be prepared for the judgment-seat of God; we have to be prepared for that wonderful new life beyond the grave.

Are such things to be met without preparation? Can we really expect that, without looking forward,

without taking any trouble to be ready when they come, they will cause us no difficulty, they will all come straight of themselves? And yet, how much do we attempt to face the fact, and to prepare for it, that we may have to be severely tried, and that we must have to die, and to be judged, and to live again afterwards? Can we really think that these things can be safely left to take their chance, to find us as they may? Can we really think that it is safe to let our tempers, our thoughts, our tongues, run riot now, and that in the day of temptation we shall be able to keep them in order without difficulty?

St. Paul says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." What trouble do we commonly take by examining ourselves, by finding out what is amiss in us, by passing sentence in our own consciences, on our own evil and perverse ways, to condemn beforehand what God must condemn; to meet His judgment with that deep sense of all that has to be pardoned in us, which alone is fit for guilty creatures appearing before their most merciful, yet most awful Judge?

We do not look forward and dare to face what yet we know must soon be upon us.

And so with the other point. We are not thorough. We have only half a heart in our wish to do right. Else why is it that when we know the sins and temptations which beset us, we take so little trouble to escape from them and conquer them? Our conscience makes us see and wish for what is right; we follow it to a certain point; we follow it while it gives us no trouble. Nay, we follow it up to a certain point in spite of difficulties; we follow

and keep to it for a certain time, in spite of attempts to lead us wrong; and then, just when we have half gained our victory, we give way, we let ourselves be shaken, we slip back again into the mire from which our steps were all but delivered; and all our endeavours, all our progress, all our good resolutions, are wasted and thrown away. Thrown away for want of a little more thoroughness, a little more resolution to carry out what is right, and what we have begun, to the fair end.

The unjust steward ended as he began; he began by cheating, and carried his bad ways through. And so he gained what he cheated for, an idle living. We begin well, and spoil it all by stopping short; by slackness, by want of faith, by want of serious belief that we have to live and work in earnest for God, and in the ways of goodness, as much as people work in earnest for the world and its rewards. He went through and faltered not. We do things by halves. We check our tongues, but not regularly and always. We say our prayers, but not always. We do not neglect our church, but we do not make a conscience of coming. We come to church, but stop short at the Holy Sacrament. We say our prayers, sometimes taking trouble to attend, sometimes taking none. We make a rule against some bad habit, keep to it while it is new and fresh, get tired of it and give it up when we are accustomed to it. All the care, all the patience, all the perseverance, all the consistency, which men find necessary for success in the world, we think may be done without, when we are running the awful race of life on which depends the salvation of our souls.

Remember, our Master has warned us. Do not let us think that, because we may hope that by His mercy we have been made "children of light," we are freed from that care and trouble which we all see to be so necessary in the world. The world, and all that goes on in it, its great movements, its wonderful schemes, its astonishing successes, its endless labours, all witness against us, that with such heavenly and lasting hopes we are so far below those who only serve the world, in earnestness and seriousness and consistency. Wickedness itself, in its thorough-going, unflinching steadfastness in wrong, rebukes the faltering and hanging back and cowardice of those who wish to do right.

Let us hear the Lord's warning, and see it confirmed all around us, and recognise our danger. We hope that we are on the side of our Master Christ. Let us not be on such a side, and yet betray it. The world is ashamed of folly and faintheartedness in its servants. Let us pray that we may not, by folly and faintheartedness, bring shame on what is right; on the service of the Master who spared not to give His own life for us.

## XXVIII

## THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE A PILGRIMAGE

"Strangers and pilgrims on the earth."—HEBREWS xi. 13.

THIS is the description which the Bible gives of the old saints, such as Abraham and his family. They passed through things temporal on their way to things eternal. They lived in the world like travellers on the road. The world was even more to them than it has been to the children of faith and promise in later times; for God's especial promise to them was that land of inheritance which was to be given to them, and their children after them. Yet, even "in the land of promise," they "sojourned as in a strange land, dwelling in tabernacles," that is, living, not in fixed strongly-built houses, but in tents put up to-day, taken down to-morrow, such as wayfarers and soldiers use on their passage through a country. For they had not yet reached home, the city where they would dwell, but they "looked for a city which hath foundations," which could not fall into ruins or be overthrown, "whose builder and maker is God." That was their feeling; and their life, as it was appointed them of God, was such as to keep up this feeling. For though other men in their times built houses and lived in them, had their own proper country and home, and passed their lives in them,

Abraham, on the contrary, was in fact, as well as in faith and thought, a wanderer. He was called to go out into a "place which he should after"—but long afterwards, and only in the person of his children —"receive for an inheritance; and he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went."

And, as it also says, if he had chosen to rest, and be quiet in a home of his own, he might have done so; he had only to go back to his kindred and to his father's house, and stay there. "If they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." But they never thought of turning their faces backward, or returning, for "they desired a better country, that is, an heavenly." And so they went on through life, and to life's end,—waiting, and pressing onward from tent to tent, from well to well, from one stage of the journey to the next, literally and in fact, and also in mind and heart, till the end of the journey here was reached; and they "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced" and greeted them, saluting and making them welcome in their hearts, "and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Our life, at first sight, does not look like that of "strangers and pilgrims." A settled home is what most of us get accustomed to; and in our thoughts we feel about things present as if they would always be the same. It is difficult to throw ourselves forward, and fancy all round us different; fancy ourselves in a new place; fancy those faces which are about us gone and changed, and new ones in their

places; fancy ourselves what old age must make us, and those who are now children grown up to be their own masters. But yet we know that this settled, fixed appearance of things is only our own mistake, our own want of knowledge and of the power of foreseeing things, which, we are sure, must after all come to pass. Whether we feel it or not, our life too is but that of strangers and pilgrims, and, like the old patriarchs, we have no "continuing city." Whether we, like them, "seek one to come" is another matter; but certain it is that, like them, we too are but on the road; we too are passing through things temporal on our way to things eternal.

It is of the greatest importance to us to feel this; first, because it is true, and what is true is the best thing in the end to know and believe, though perhaps it is not always at the time the most pleasant; and next, because not to feel it is to be without faith and hope, to be without any reason for looking forward.

It was the great proof of the faith of the old saints that they did really believe in God and the world to come, and that "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him," and "a consuming fire" to those who disobey Him. I say, it was the proof of this belief and conviction in the old saints that they did feel their life to be but a journey.

And if we live and think and feel as if we had already got home for good, and were settled here in this world, it is difficult for us to be thinking much of the city and home which are to come, or to be "seeing afar off" God's promises, and welcoming and saluting them as visitors from a better country,

whose greatness we shall one day see and be glad of.

It is difficult to feel it. For God has appointed us all our duties and work in life; and how can we do these unless we throw ourselves heartily into them; unless we feel settled and at home in them; unless we feel as if we were bound to them for good; unless we feel interest in them, and love and attachment to the place and the things among which we carry on our work? How can we feel as "strangers and pilgrims," when in reality we seem to be the most fixed and settled of mankind? How can we feel like "dwellers in tabernacles" when we know that our life is spent in the same house for years? How can we look forward to change when our happiness, our success, nay, our duty, require us not to be restless, but to give our best attention to that which our hand finds to do? How are we to feel that all we do is but a shadow soon to pass away and be forgotten, when we know that to do our work well at all we must feel about it as if it were the most important thing in the world, and worth all the pains that we can take about it? How can we get to feel as "strangers and pilgrims" without losing our interest, and becoming slack about doing our part to keep the work of the world going on? How can we throw ourselves heartily into our work, as God has made it our duty to do, and work as if we were working in our settled and appointed home, without losing the real, ever-present feeling that we are travellers passing through life very quickly, and without forgetting the place to which we are really bound?

The two things are not so contrary, if we think a moment. For, consider the life of such a one as the Patriarch Abraham. As the Bible tells us, he lived all his days confessing himself a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. His thoughts were ever on that end of his travelling, the home where his God would receive him, the "city . . . whose builder and maker is God." Yet, do you suppose that he did nothing but dream of that? Do not you suppose that his days actually passed as yours do? Do you suppose that he did not, like men now, rise in the morning and go forth to his work and to his labour until the evening? Do you suppose that he, who was rich in cattle, and in men-servants and maid-servants, had not as busy a day in looking after his possessions as men have who have great works to look after now, and that his thoughts were not full of them? Do you suppose that when he happened to be fixed in a spot—the mountain by Bethel, the plain of Mamre, the wells in the desert—he did not feel himself for the time settled and at home, and go about his daily business with a quiet heart, free from restlessness and anxiety? Surely, with the great promises beckoning him onwards from his country and his father's house, and making him feel that even the land of promise was no true and abiding home for him, yet the days, as they came and went, passed over him as they do to us, each bringing its business, its task, its duty, its unexpected joy, its bitterness and grief;—and to each he gave what was its due.

The way to think of him is as of a man who leaves his own country and emigrates into a distant

land, meaning to carry on a business there, to make a livelihood, to make provision for his family, and then to return and die at home. While he is in the foreign land, that *seems* his home; and yet he feels with all his heart that it is not. He is taken up with his work there, and is busy early and late with the things of that foreign land, as if it were all in all to him; and yet his object and aim, that which is at the end of all, that for which all else is done, is far away in the land to which his thoughts go—the land to which he means to go back. He may not talk much about it in the foreign land; he may even feel that to think too much of it, and dwell on the hope of seeing it again, may weaken his activity and hinder the very thing which he wants and is working for. He speaks, perhaps, the foreign language; he has his home and settled abode there; he goes on as if he was a citizen of that country; yet all the time there is the thought of his true country in his heart,—he knows that he is but a "stranger and pilgrim" where he is. He knows it is no use to hurry, but that the years are passing fast; and yet the mainspring of all he does is something out of sight, something which does not come to the surface every day,—the hope of ending in a home very different from his present one,—one which seems so fixed and settled, yet is, with regard to his thoughts and wishes, no more than a traveller's tent.

Whether we will or no, we are "strangers and pilgrims"; we cannot alter or unmake that. Our life is passing away. We are travelling onward to something very different from our present state. While we are travelling,—while we are, as it were,

banished and in exile from the land we hope for, we have many things to employ us, many important works to do, many great duties to fulfil, much good to sow the seed of,—at any rate, the ordinary tasks of the day to discharge. These we must do; and done they cannot be unless we throw our hearts and powers into them. But besides this, we have to remember that we are but travellers, doing the work of sojourners, who cannot expect always to be where they are now, and to see the fruit of all that engages them now.

Oh then, in the midst of our work, let us let in the remembrance of that heavenly country which is so much better. There are times and seasons when it has the right to come in, and asks to come in. In the hurry and hot haste of seed-time and harvest, or of some anxious and difficult work, it is hard to think that this is but the work of travellers and pilgrims, that perhaps the end and finish of it is not to come for us at all. But all our times are not times of hurry and effort. And then let faith have its entrance; then let us look forward to the end whither we are going; then let us allow the feeling that we are travellers to come over us with its full force; then let us place ourselves in fancy at the end of our journey, and consider what we shall see and whom we shall meet when we are dead.

Surely, whatever thoughts filled Abraham's mind in the heat and hurry of the midday, these were the high hopes, this the solemn faith, which came to him as the morning brightened, and when the evening fell over the fields. Then he lifted up his soul, and saw the time when morning and evening would

cease to be. Then he saw far off, yet seeming near, the home of the everlasting city. Then he knew that he was nearer to it than he was yesterday. Then his eyes were opened, and he knew that *God is*, and that to those who seek Him He is their shield and crown, and their exceeding great reward.

Then, thinking of all these things, he confessed with joy that he was "a stranger and pilgrim" on the earth, and turned with fresh hope and strength to the work of the day before him, or with fresh peace and confidence to his rest when it was over. Then, in the sacred silence of prayer and meditation, there came to him, to sanctify and influence the life of every day, those thoughts which arrest us and bring tears into our eyes on Sundays, but which too often fade away and vanish as the week goes on.

## XXIX

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE NO TRIFLING MATTER

"Not as fools, but as wise."—EPHESIANS v. 15.

ST. PAUL throughout this passage is urgently pressing the rules of Christian living from the facts of Christian truth. Live as Christians, he says, because you know what you are, and what has been done for you as Christians. Christ descended, Christ ascended, Christ gives gifts to men; *therefore*, I adjure you, walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind. They, knowing no better, pass their lives in uncleanness and vanity: ye have not so learned Christ and His truth. The "new man" from heaven is your Lord and your example; therefore put off the old man and his deeds of shame and darkness. Ye are sealed with the Spirit of God; therefore grieve Him not with corrupt communication, with bitterness and clamour and evil-speaking. "God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you;" therefore be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving as ye have been forgiven; "be ye therefore followers of God," who has forgiven you. Christ has loved us, and given Himself a sacrifice to God for us; do you therefore walk in love as He did. You know that the kingdom of God and of Christ is the kingdom

of the truth, the kingdom of holiness and goodness; therefore let no impure deed or word be even so much as named among *you*, who hope to inherit that kingdom. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light . . . and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." There is no hiding from the light; it makes all things plain and manifest. Light is come to us, and has shown us what we are, and where we are going; the light calls to us, at once in its certainty and in its gladdening comfort. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

With this light then shining on us, let us think what we are about. Let us not go on at random, as if having the light made no difference to us as to how we must feel and how we must live.

And St. Paul seems to draw up all that he has been saying in a short earnest appeal to every one who has sense to understand his words: "See then that ye walk circumspectly," as men who know what they are about; "not as fools, but as wise; . . . understanding what the will of the Lord is." The will of the Lord, whom you know to be your Saviour and your Judge; and who wills you to live holily, righteously, and soberly in this present world.

"Not as fools, but as wise." St. Paul, as I said, appeals to us as reasonable creatures; he appeals to our common sense, to what must be clear to our own mind and judgment, as soon as we give the subject any serious thought. I am but asking you, he seems to say, to look at

matters round you, and concerning you, as they really are, and to judge for yourselves accordingly. Let your rule of living and acting and feeling be according to the real state of things amid which you know you live, which you believe and acknowledge and profess.

If you have any common sense, the things which you know and believe of yourself and the world about you must make a difference to your way of going on. A fool is he who will take no count of his circumstances; who will have his own way in the teeth of all the certain facts of the world around him; who insists on living just as if they were different, or as if he could make them different by choosing. Consider your real circumstances, St. Paul says: think what you know about your condition, and your place and outlook in this life: think of what, without any manner of doubt, you have learnt to believe all day long of what this life is, what it was given you for, and what is to come after it: think of the part which God has taken in it to help and save you; what Christ has done and given and promised; and then consider how "wise men" and not "fools," men of common sense and plain straightforward understanding, ought to shape their lives amid circumstances such as these:—knowing all they know, living in such a world, and dealing with such certain facts, as we have to do with.

Suppose it had been different. Suppose for a moment that all that we know and believe had never been,—were wiped out of thought and knowledge. Suppose that we had never heard of a God; that we found ourselves alone on earth, not knowing in the

slightest degree how we came here, why we were living; whether God had made us or not, or what He meant us for. Suppose that all we knew of our life were that *there it was*, with its beginning, about which we could know nothing—with its end, after which we could know nothing more. Suppose that the thoughts and language of men had been as silent about God, our Maker and Ruler, as are the winds and the stars; that no one had ever heard of Him; that we were to Him as the brute creatures, which live and die without knowing Him.

Or suppose that we had only heard of Him by dim and uncertain report, as the heathen may, but that He had never had any dealings with us, and we knew not where to find Him, or what He was.

Imagine this to be our state, passing through life without the faintest notion of what life is, where it comes from, and whither it goes; having no light to guide us but what we could get for ourselves; having no help out of this world, no comfort, no refuge, no prospects: nothing but the dark unknown hopeless grave. Suppose this was the condition of things in which we were living. There would be no prayer, for there would be no God to pray to, or to hope in. There would be no faith, no love of God, no obedience. I do not say that there would be no sense of right and wrong: it is hard even to imagine man without that, and conscience; but there would be nothing to support right and to condemn wrong: there would be nothing which we could guess at to show us what was right and what was wrong: there might be hope and a sense of peace in doing right rather than wrong, but there would be no all-seeing

and holy Eye to watch, no good and loving Father to please, no great Judge and Rewarder to accept at last. We should be in the world as those whom no one cared for; forlorn outcasts, knowing their own bitterness, knowing pain and sickness, and heart-ache and death,—knowing all the evils of the world, and, too surely, the evil of their own hearts; knowing that, somehow, they were *wrong* and in ruin, but without any one above to look up to and to think of them, without redemption, without remedy, without hope.

Then, when you have taken in what it would be thus to know life, thus to pass through it, then turn and consider what is, in fact, the case with us. We cannot, without difficulty, imagine what I have been supposing. We cannot, without an effort and strain, fancy a world, fancy our human existence, without God, and the knowledge of God. Not we only, but the whole world, knows God. Even the very heathen, in one way or another, with the grossest and foulest errors about Him, yet dimly see his awful Power and Godhead amid the darkness of their idolatries. The thought of God is the first and easiest of thoughts to us. His Name is everywhere; good and evil alike own and fear Him. His mercy is our first refuge in distress; we pray to Him, and are sure He listens to us, and believe in His loving-kindness. We know where we come from—even from His will and His hand. We know why we are here—even to grow up, through gifts and through trials, to a fitness for something higher and greater than this life. We know what we are meant for,—whither we are going; we are born, we die, for the

life of the world to come, for the life that has no end. We know something of the strange and awful mystery of our sin, of the terrible struggle within us, between good and evil, between light and darkness; we know that we are fallen, but we know that we have the power of recovery, and are meant to be restored.

We know that we need not yield to sin, that we may triumph over it, and cast it out of our hearts. We know too, not merely that there is a difference between right and wrong, but what it is that the Eternal Judge of the world thinks right and thinks wrong; what is like Him and what is unlike Him; what it is His will that we should follow, and what it is His will that we should depart from.

But this is little. Heathens knew something of this; forgetful Jews knew more. But we Christians have a knowledge of the mighty works of God which leaves all this behind. We know that God has been with men, has spoken to them, has made them know by their own knowledge something of His mind, His thoughts, His goodness, His wrath, His love. We believe in Jesus Christ, the everlasting Son of the Father, the Maker, and Light and Life of men. We believe that when He took upon him to deliver man, He did not abhor the Virgin's womb. We believe even more than this: we believe that He died for our sins, and that when He had overcome the sharpness of death, He did open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. We believe that He sitteth at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father. We believe that He shall come to be our Judge. We believe that in this world of sin

and trouble and death we have in Him one who hears all prayers, and heals all wrongs, and can bind up every broken heart. There men may appeal to a love which has made even God's world look new; "We pray Thee, *therefore*, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood." Go where we may, look where we will, we are met, in manifold shapes, with the memorial of one state of salvation. Turn our eyes where we will, they encounter something which reminds us of the cross of Christ.

I go back to the text, "Walk . . . not as fools, but as wise." Put these two pictures side by side: life as we supposed it just now, without knowing whether God is, or anything about Him, without knowing what we are living for, or who made us, or what is to become of us; and on the other side life in which man throws himself on the love of God, as His servant, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

As men of common sense, St. Paul appeals to us: is it possible that the manner of feeling and thinking and acting, which might be natural under the first set of circumstances, can suit the other? Would any man of sense, who knew and believed that this last was the fact, think of living as if all that we knew of were the first? Would it not be one of those things which would seem past belief if it were not that it is one of the common sights of our experience that men can actually, in a certain manner, know and believe what St. Paul teaches us about our state here, and yet live a life which they might live just as well if they were absolutely without God in the world? And are not St. Paul's words but the

words of plain truth and soberness, when he calls upon us,—"not as fools, but as wise," as men who wish to have some sense and consistency in what they do,—when, I say, he calls on us, and warns us, knowing and believing what we do, not to live as if we did not know it.

It was lowering man and his soul, with its great gifts of reason and conscience and knowledge, of love and sympathy and brotherhood, of justice and truth and courage which could face death,—it was lowering man so endowed below the beasts that perish, when men, even in their ignorance and uncertainty about God, said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But only think, quietly and seriously, of the distance which we are from that uncertainty and ignorance. Think of what to us is certain, of what to us is clear and plain. Think what we look back to. Think what, past the grave, and past the judgment, lies before us. Think that it is our lot to live in the customary and continual belief of a Divine Saviour, who cared so much for us as to come down among us; and who gave His life for our sins, that we might be forgiven, and might live. Is it wisdom or is it folly to shape our lives by the truth of which we are convinced, by the facts of which we are certain? Is it wisdom or is it folly, knowing all this, to live as we might live if we knew nothing, and had nothing but this life and this world before us; or to live as St. Paul, in these chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians, teaches Christian men and women to live, doing the will and fulfilling the purposes of the God with whom they have so much to do?

## XXX

## THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT

"This is the first and great commandment."—ST. MATTHEW xxii. 38.

SPEAKING to a Christian congregation, I need not say *what* this commandment is. You all know, as far as head knowledge goes,—at least you all might and ought to answer, without any one telling you, what commandment Christ was speaking of. There can be but one which to us is the first and great commandment. The Jewish lawyer might come to Jesus to ask Him which is the great commandment of the law, but even he knew it quite well. He did not ask because he did not know, he asked "tempting" Christ,—as people ask when they want to get something from another's mouth to puzzle or condemn him. But we, at any rate, have this answer of our Master Christ to teach us, even if the light of our own reason was not enough,—that to us there can be only one "first and great commandment" to be thought of, and that one, *the love of God.* "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

The love of God is the chief and principal part of the religion which we are taught in the New Testament, and Christians were meant to be different

from the rest of the world in this one thing above all others, that they knew and loved God. This is so plain that there is no need to say a word to prove it. Open what part of the New Testament you please, and you find it, in one way or another, speaking of the love of God. The great things which Christ has done for us are told us, and dwelt upon, to make us love the God who so loved us. The greatest hope and promise which it gives us for the time to come is the fuller knowledge and love of God. St. Paul and St. John and the Evangelists say a great deal in their writings about the love of God, but it is plain that beyond what they *say*, their whole hearts and minds and lives were full of it: in their smallest and lightest actions it is there; it is plainly the only thing which was the reason and motive of all they propose to themselves, or attempt, or wish for. Why should they labour as they did, but from their love of God? Why should they be so patient and happy in their afflictions, but that they loved God, and gladly suffered for His sake? Why should they have been so full of zeal, but out of love of God? What made them write so much, write with such tenderness, such wisdom, such firmness and seriousness in exhorting and rebuking, such deep insight into the mind of man and the counsels of God, but that they loved Him above all things? The love of God was in all they did and thought and spoke and felt; it filled and ruled their lives, it made them die for Him cheerfully and gladly. So that, as I said, the New Testament makes the love of God the one great mark of the Gospel, and shows us also how truly it was the great mark

of the Gospel in those whom Christ first sent to preach it.

But now the question is, What is meant by the love of God? because it must mean something. It cannot be a mere form of words, to signify merely that men are to be well-behaved and respectable and honest and just to one another, and brave and careful of their families, and hard-working and sober. You will not suppose that I mean that these are matters of little consequence, or that any one can be a good Christian, a true follower of Jesus Christ, who wants these qualities. What I mean is, that though he who loves God must have all these qualities, yet this cannot be all that is meant by what the Gospel is always speaking about, the love of God.

For the Bible does not use words at random. When it uses a word it means by it what that word stands for and is used for among men. When it speaks of love, it means what is meant by the word love. We know what love means when we speak of loving our friends, or loving our father or mother or family, or loving our home. It does not mean merely being just and honest to them, and behaving respectably to them. It means all this indeed, but it means a great deal more too. It means that we feel in our hearts drawn to them; that we feel pleasure in doing them good and making them happy; that we like to be with them, and miss them when they are away; that we rejoice with them when they are glad, and grieve when they are sorrowful. It means that we care for them, and think about them, and delight in them for themselves,— for nothing else but themselves.

Well then, when the Bible speaks of our being able to love Almighty God, of our duty and blessedness as Christians consisting in the love of God, it means something by love which we can form an idea of by knowing what love means when spoken of among men. It means that it is not outward conduct only, but the feelings and affections of our hearts, which God expects us to give Him. The Bible wishes to raise us to feel towards Almighty God in our hearts the same sort of affection which we all of us understand when we speak of loving our friends on earth. It seeks to make us not merely believe in God, not merely obey the words of God, but love Him.

To believe in God is necessary, and to obey Him is necessary, but it is imperfect Gospel religion till the heart has learnt to love Him,—to delight in Him, to lean on Him, to trust in Him, to be glad to think of Him and praise Him, to pour out its fears and sorrows before Him, to hope for Him as its everlasting good, and to think of His presence and the communion with Him in heaven as its great and satisfying reward. This is what the Gospel calls Christians to reach after, and what it offers them. It is indeed a wonderful thing that mortal and sinful men can love the Almighty and Invisible God. But that is the promise and the call of Jesus Christ, and till we have begun to learn what it is to love our heavenly Father in our hearts, we have not yet learnt what the Gospel has to give us.

But now, I can imagine a good many persons saying in their heart, How can this be meant for us? How is it possible that what seem such high and

great things can be meant for us? How can we be expected to think much about God, we who have so little time to ourselves, we who had so little opportunity of learning when we were young; who can understand but a small part of the prayers, or the sermons, or the Bible itself, even when it is read to us? These things seem above us. They are for those who have had time to read and learn, and can understand difficult matters. God cannot have called us to such things.

Now, the first thing I will say to this is, Was not the Gospel first preached to the poor? and do you suppose that the poor, among whom Christ lived, out of whom He chose His Apostles, and to whom He sent them preaching, were so different from poor, hard-working men and women now? Surely they were not. I am sure, on the other hand, that the poor people of our own time and country, wherever Christ's Word is preached, have a great deal more preparation for learning to know and love God than the poor Jews to whom Christ ministered when He was on earth. And most of those to whom St. Paul and St. John and St. Peter wrote their Epistles were not the rich and the learned, but the poor.

Yet the Apostles could speak to them freely of the love of God, and the poor men and women to whom they wrote could understand them; because they had learned that "first and great commandment"; they had learned truly to love God, to feel real love and trust and hope and thankfulness to Him in their very hearts, just as they felt love to their friends and families.

If then any should think in their heart that it is no use for them to think of loving Almighty God, because they are so hard-worked, and only understand things that concern their families and their labour, I ask them this question, How can you tell till you have tried? And have you ever tried to put yourself in the way of coming at last to know and love Almighty God? Have you really ever taken any trouble about it?

You must not expect God in a moment to turn your heart away from the love of the world, and give you in a moment the comfort and blessing of loving Him. Only God's Holy Spirit can teach you to love God; only He can change your heart and give you the new heart and the new spirit, without which no man can love God. But He will not come and do His great work in you, the work that He only can do, if He sees that you do not care whether He comes or not.

So I ask, Have you ever really thought to yourself, Do I love God, and shall I ever come to love Him as the holy men we read of in the Bible loved Him? If you have not cared at all about the matter, of course it is not wonderful that you feel no love for Him now. But you must not talk about its being your condition in life, or your want of learning, or your hard work, which makes it impossible that you should ever be able to reach so far as the love of God. You have not tried, you have not given yourself the least trouble about the matter. Can you judge from this careless way of living what God might, of His goodness, help you to do, if you really wished that you might learn before you die the

unspeakable comfort of loving Him with a true and holy love? You have not used heartily any of God's means of grace, you have foolishly thought that everything was quite well with you; how can you expect God to give you more grace, when you have not used what He has already given you? What business have you to say that the blessing of setting their hearts and their love upon God is not meant for poor and unlearned persons,—to give up the thought and wish and hope of coming yourselves to love Him,—when you will not put yourselves in the way of His salvation?

It would be a real denial of all the words of grace and mercy in the New Testament to suppose that a man's being rich or poor, learned or unlearned, in high station or in low, made the least difference as to his being able, by God's grace, to know and love his heavenly Father and his Redeemer with all the love of his heart; to love Him, as Christ says, with all his heart and mind and strength. All you who hear me now might, if you would, come to know that a Christian life is not merely a quiet, orderly, sober, respectable life,—a life of outward respect to God's law and word,—but a life of love to Almighty God, a life in which you could feel as much comfort and joy and peace in loving God as you can feel in loving your children or your parents or your friends.

But how should you get to it? My brethren, most assuredly the love of God is God's own gift, and His most precious one. He must give it to you; all that you can do is to seek and wish and ask for it, and to take care not to do that which may prevent Him from giving it you; to prepare your

hearts for the time when it may please Him to visit you with His consolation. But remember you must begin by fearing Him, if you are ever to love Him.

And what I am going to say now is what lies in the power of all to try and remember. If you wish to come in time to know by experience what a blessed thing it is to love God in your real inward heart, keep in mind these few simple points :—

1. You must not have idols in your hearts, or set the stumbling-block of your iniquity before your face, if you ever hope to love God. Sin is like a poison, which kills the love of God and heavenly things. When a man begins in earnest, by God's help, to cast out his sins and evil desires, then he is beginning to be in a way in which he may come at last to know God with the love of his soul, and to rejoice in that blessed comfort.

2. The way to fight against and by degrees to overcome our sins, is in every one's power, if they would but use it. A man does not need to be book-learned, or to be clever, to resist his sins, and to receive God's cleansing and pardoning grace. His sins are the wrong evil deeds which he does one by one. He need not have done them. He knows that he had the power to say *no*, or to keep back his eyes, or his hand, or his tongue, when he was tempted. He need not do them any more, if he will only manfully call God to help him to try. Well then, the next time you are tempted, *go and try*; make a beginning. Perhaps something may happen to provoke you very much; if you were to open your mouth you could not help, you say, bursting out into passionate and bitter words; well then,

make a strong effort, shut your mouth, think of God, and resolve not to answer a word for the time; turn away, and do not speak till your anger has cooled down. Is there any one among us who can say that he cannot do this? Of course not—a child can do this, if only he will. Then surely there is not one among us who may not if he only will make a beginning of resisting his temptations and overcoming his sins. He will not succeed perfectly at first; no one can do a difficult thing well for the first time. But if he will only make a beginning, and go on doing what all of us can do if we only choose, God will help him, and watch over him, and give him daily more and more strength, till he is able, with Christ at his side, to overcome and put to flight the wicked one and his fiery darts.

3. We cannot hope to love God without knowing Him; we cannot hope to know Him without communing with Him in the only way in which we can do so,—in prayer. As long as we do not pray, or try to pray, it is certainly quite hopeless that we should ever come to love God, for we cannot keep Him in mind without praying to Him, and we cannot expect His grace will come to us unless we ask for it.

Most of us, I know, have not time to pray much, but I am afraid that many make that a reason for not praying at all. I will mention two things which any one in this congregation, any family in this parish, could do, as a beginning, if only they would. There is no one, man, woman, or child, but might, if they pleased, say their prayers to God in the morning;—surely in the evening too, if they had but a heart to it; but I speak now of the

morning. There is no one, I am quite sure, who could not spare five minutes,—and many could spare more,—to kneel down at their bedside and say two or three short prayers from the Prayer-book, with the Lord's Prayer, keeping their thoughts fixed and attentive on what they are saying. Next, there is not a household in which on the Sunday evening the father and mother could not gather the whole family together for a little while, while some one read a chapter, or a few verses from the Bible, or a Psalm, and afterwards the head of the family prayed for God's blessing on them all for the week to come, and gave Him thanks for His past goodness. I do not believe that any one who did even so much regularly for one or two years, with a humble and sincere wish to please Christ, would be in any doubt at the end whether a poor man, be he ever so unlearned or hard-worked, could come to feel and understand something of the goodness of God,—something of what it is to love Him with the true love of his heart.

4. There is, lastly, one great means of blessing which is open to the poorest, and where the poorest may learn, if only he will come with a true heart, to love and adore and rejoice in the great God who has made and redeemed him, and has promised to be his everlasting reward—the Holy Communion. Oh! my brethren, if instead of avoiding that Holy Sacrament, making up your minds that it cannot be meant for such as you, and passing your lives without ever coming near it, you would trust your Saviour, who calls you there; you would trust Christ who loved you, and gave the Holy Sacrament for your comfort

and salvation ; if only you would come and taste and see that the Lord is gracious, you would not talk of poor men not being able to feel love to God as the Bible says that Christians ought to love Him.

"This is the first and great commandment," said our Master Christ, not to a few, but to all of us. All of us are called to fulfil it, all of us may find our blessedness in fulfilling it. Would that we could believe that to love God is indeed to be perfectly happy. If we loved God with all our heart, how little would this world be to us. If we loved God, how little should we be tempted by the sins which ruin men's souls, and make them miserable. If we loved God, and felt how He loved us, how light would the sufferings of this present time seem, how ready should we be to endure affliction for His sake, how comforted should we be in sickness or sorrow to know that God would give to us all this exceeding and unspeakable comfort,—the comfort and the consolation and the joy, which passeth all understanding, of really loving Him above all things, trusting Him, hoping for Him, as our unfailing and everlasting portion ; a Father and Friend who can never change, a Rewarder who can make the loss of all things sweet to us, a Saviour who in the hour and bitterness of death can give us peace.

This was what St. Paul found in loving God and being loved by Him. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" he cries out in the midst of his fiery persecutions. "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am

persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." May God give us all to know the comfort of this love, for we all, rich and poor, teachers and taught, high and low, can never be happy without it.

## XXXI

## THE PERFECT LIGHT OF GOD

"This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."—1 ST. JOHN i. 5.

THIS, that is, is the message which we, the Apostles, have heard from Him, who was the Word of Life, who came down from heaven to make men have a more certain and more perfect knowledge of Almighty God; who came to reveal to us the truth by which we might believe on Him and live. This is the message brought by Him who was from the beginning, whom living men on earth had seen with their eyes, and listened to, and looked upon, and handled with their hands. This is the message brought by the only-begotten Son about His Father; the message brought by Him who alone of all beings was with the Father, and knew the Father, and could reveal the Father to men. This was what Jesus Christ had taught His Apostles, and made them understand and believe: "that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." In Him is no shade, or speck, or stain. In Him is no fault or shortcoming. In Him is no error, or mistake, or uncertainty. In Him is no deceit or falsehood. In Him is nothing to cloud the brightness of perfection. All in Him is

righteous: all in Him is truth: all in Him is wise: all in Him is holy.

It seems a very simple thing to say that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." We almost wonder at the Bible taking so much trouble to say it. For, we might think, how could God be otherwise? How could we imagine God to be imperfect, wanting in goodness, and holiness, and wisdom, and truth? How could God *be* God unless He were all Perfect,—Light without a shade of darkness?—And this is true.

But how is it that we have come to have these thoughts of God? How is it that it seems to us so plain and unquestionable a thing that God should be all Light, without any spot or imperfection? It is that we have got our thoughts of God from Jesus Christ His Son, and from those who have declared His message to us in the Bible. It is that the Gospel has become so much a matter of course to us, that its truth has come to seem to us our own thoughts. It *does*, indeed, seem to us the plainest thing in the world that we should think it impossible to believe of God that He is anything but most Holy and Good and Perfect; but it is not our own wisdom and understanding which has impressed this upon us. We owe it to the Gospel, and to the deep root which the Gospel teaching has struck in the thoughts of men.

But it was by no means so plain and simple a truth to the world when St. John wrote his Epistle. He wrote when the world believed in idols and false gods without number. And those false gods were not thought of as we think of God. They were

not thought of as being all Light, and having in them no darkness at all. They were believed to be not more perfect, not more holy, not more pure and good, than the men who worshipped them. All the evil things which men find in themselves, and in one another, they were ready to find in the gods whom they prayed to and trusted in. It was indeed a *new* message when Christ's Apostles came and told the heathen that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." A new message; and in those days, a strange and hard one. For men liked to believe that God was no holier and better than themselves. They liked to believe that the sins and works of darkness in which they took pleasure were also found above in the God who ruled the world. It was, they thought, an excuse for their sin, that in those to whom they prayed the same sin was found. It was not to any one either a welcome or a likely message that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

But those days of idolatry and ignorance are past; and perhaps we think that we do not need to be reminded that God is Light—perfectly Pure and Holy and True and Good. We do not want to be taught this truth in words, for in words we know it and acknowledge it. But we do still want to be taught it in its meaning and truth. We do want to be reminded that there are those still who do not in their hearts believe that God is Light; who do not feel and inwardly acknowledge that in Him there is no darkness of sin and folly and weakness at all.

For is it not so that, instead of really believing

that God is Light, without stain or shade of sin, we often make Him out in our thoughts to be what we like and wish Him to be? What does the sinner *wish* God to be? He wishes God to be kind and indulgent to his sin. He wishes God to be of that nature that He will not take notice or care, if the sinner follows his own way, and breaks the commandments. He wishes God to shut His eyes to the thing, when a man goes against his own conscience, and does what he knows is wrong. He wishes God to be a God who always rewards and never punishes; who will do good to us whether we obey Him or not; who will be equally ready to receive and accept us, whether we come to Him in truth or in pretence, whether we serve Him or serve ourselves. A God who is blind, and can be taken in, and imposed upon; a God who will put up with any excuses, and bear any hypocrisy; a God who does not care enough about goodness and truth to punish those who will have none of goodness and truth,—this is the God whom the sinner wishes to have; this is the God whom he would like to believe in. And, I am afraid, this is the God whom he too often fashions to himself in his own thoughts, and persuades himself is the God who made the world, and who sent His only-begotten Son to die, that He might redeem and save it.

And do we never fall into such thoughts of God? Do we never sin, hoping that, after all, God will not think so severely of our sin as the Bible seems to make out that He will? Do we never comfort and flatter ourselves with such general excuses as that God is merciful, and will not be hard upon us, and

is very long-suffering, and will not require of us to be so very strict, or so very good, or so very holy, or so very self-denying? Do we not, instead of taking the Bible, and reading there the true character of the God whom we worship, make an image according to our own imperfections and sins, and call it God? We sneer at the superstitions of the heathen. But what is it when we do wrong, and think to satisfy and make friends with God by setting against the sin which we have done, or the duty we have neglected, something else which we think we have done right, and which will please Him? What is this but thinking that God is one who can be bought over, and bribed, and bargained with, as we are? Is this the God who "is Light, and in Him is no darkness"? Can we be said really to believe in Him, when we treat Him as if He were foolish, and could not see through our cunning devices, and could be flattered into good humour with us, and be prevailed upon to treat us as favourites?

We should shudder to say in so many words that God is a respecter of persons; but do not we too often treat Him as if He were, and think of Him as if He might be, if He were only so to us? Do we not do so when we make no doubt that He will let *us* off easier than He lets off others? Do we not do so when we think of Him as just and true and holy when He has to deal with the sins and offences of the world in general; but as laying aside His justice and holiness when He comes to deal with our sins in particular?

Again: what a sad show of our real thoughts about God is to be found in the manner of our

worship and in our prayers. Who that really believed in the perfection of God could worship Him as I am afraid our conscience must tell us that we so often worship Him, — that so many worship Him every Sunday? If He "is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all," what must He think of worship which only pretends to worship and honour Him? of prayer which does not really ask in spirit for the thing it speaks about? If I kneel down and say over a number of words which are in sound full of repentance for sin, and honour to God's law, and the desire to do better, and requests to be strengthened and taught and guided; and yet all the time mean nothing real by all this,—what thought can I have of the God, whom I can suppose likely to endure all this, and leave it unpunished? And from carelessness, and want of being serious, and taking pains about our prayers, does not this happen to most of us, much oftener than we should like to confess to others? Are there not some who must be aware that their prayers are said in this way only, and never in any other; never with any truth and reality, never with any trying in earnest to pray? Can it be said of us that, in such a case, we have right and true thoughts about God? Can it be said that we really believe the great message brought by Jesus Christ, that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all?"

So that it is no unnecessary thing to remind people of this, though they know it, that God is not like weak and imperfect men; but that far above all that we can imagine of perfect purity, and goodness, and holiness, and truth, and love and

justice, "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." We cannot strive too earnestly to get this belief stamped and graven in our hearts; for we are certainly under the temptation to be setting up in our hearts a fancy and an image of God which is not the true one, which is made simply after our own likeness, and to suit our convenience and our sins.

God is what He is, whatever we may think. And earnestly ought we to strive and pray that we may know Him as He is, and always think of Him as He is. He changes not; and what He has declared Himself to be by His Son, and in His Holy Book, that He will remain. Our foolish thoughts of Him cannot prevail on Him to leave His perfection, and become like what we may, in our folly, imagine Him. If He hates sin, He will not be prevailed on *not* to care about it, that we may escape harmless. If He is truth, He will not give up His truth that our feigned excuses may succeed. Merciful and gracious, ready to pardon, to purify, to strengthen,—that we know He is. Let us not make a mocking resemblance of all this, to favour our sins and our hypocrisy, and deceive ourselves into calling it the God of Love.

Let us keep before our minds this message of St. John, and try to understand and believe its great and solemn meaning. When we kneel down to pray, let us set before our thoughts that we are going to speak to, and to hold communion with, Him in whom is no darkness at all; who is pure and perfect Light, Light which no sin can bear, Light which pierces through and makes manifest all secrets and devices. Let us

keep it before us, in all our doings, that God is Light; that He is one who is not to be deceived about sin; that He is one whom it is impossible to reconcile to sin; one to whom it is vain to make excuses for doing what is wrong. Let us pray Him to give us true and right thoughts about Himself. For as a man's God is, so is the man himself. According to what we believe of God, such will be our hearts and our thoughts about what is right and wrong, about what is good and what is sin.

"God is Light:" and "if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship" with the Father and the Son. We have fellowship, a fellowship not of this world, but of the kingdom of heaven, one with another; "and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

For, as St. John is well aware, walking in the light, and earnestly trying to serve God and follow Christ, does not mean being altogether without sin. But it does mean earnestly striving against it,—earnestly and honestly repenting of it. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar;" we contradict the revelation which He has made of His goodness and perfect holiness,—"and the truth is not in us." But if we are honest and true to our consciences and to God, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

May we so walk through the darkness to the Perfect Light: and so find each day the darkness growing less thick and heavy, and the dawn of the everlasting morning brightening more and more to us.

# XXXII

## FAREWELL SERMON

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."—1 CORINTHIANS vii. 29-31.

IT is one of the secrets of the power which the Bible has over us, that it throws itself with such sympathy into all our interests and all our feelings, simply as men. Its divine teaching and wisdom comes to us under human forms, and in the language of human experience. Coming from heaven, and telling of God and eternity, it clothes itself in human shape, and speaks the words of human life, of human gladness, of human anxiety and sorrow and fear. It is a history of men, of families, of friendships, of the ups and downs of agitated lives, of the affection of fathers and children, of husbands and wives, of brethren and companions, of those who have joyed together and mourned together. It is a record of what men have actually found in these few short years of their sojourn on earth,—of their love, of their grief, of their quarrels and enmities—of their wisdom and goodness and enjoyment of life,—of the mistakes and follies and sins and sufferings

which are so familiar to us. It fears not to speak as we speak, when our feelings are strong. The prophet of immortality, it yet echoes in the Psalms all our awe and downheartedness and dread at the prospect of death. The messenger to us of the most assured and loftiest hope, it is not ashamed to speak with us the language of our bitterest agony and distress; at times it seems not to refuse even the fellowship of our despair. And on the other hand, man's heart cannot rejoice and pour forth the overflow of its joy, in gladness more abounding and more rapturous than that of the songs of the Bible. Whatever chances and changes we meet with, whatever touches and moves and stirs our souls, however life comes to us, blessing us with happiness, or charged with duties, or dark with pain and change, in the Bible we may find our likeness, in the Bible we shall find our thoughts anticipated, in the Bible we shall find the words of those who saw what we see, who found what we find, who felt what we feel. And so it repeats our common feelings and words about the passing away of time and life. What comes home to us from time to time with such piercing truth, as to the way in which the years slip away from us, altering all that we are accustomed to rest upon, and bringing us so much nearer to the end,—all this we find faithfully and most feelingly written in a hundred places in our Bible. We cannot express what we think and feel half as forcibly and impressively as it is written there. And our Bible is to us as our friend. We feel that it understands us. We feel that it knows what we are, that it throws itself even into our weakness and our heart-aches, that

it takes up our load with us, and claims a right to comfort us because it knows what weighs us down. In our sadness it is sad; in our affliction it is afflicted; that it may win us on to trust its promise, to be strengthened with its courage, to drink in its hope. "Oh! remember how short my time is, wherefore hast Thou made all men for nought." "Mine age is even as nothing in respect of Thee; and verily every man at his best state is but vanity." "I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength, before I go hence and be no more seen." What words of more hopeless anguish ever burst from human lips, than these which are written in the Book which is our witness that man was *not* made for nought, which God has given us as our counter-charm to death, as our guide to everlasting life.

We may then, unblamed, indulge our natural feelings, when the truth is brought home to us personally, that indeed the "time is short": that "the fashion of this world passeth away." To-day is such a day for you and for me. To-day is a day when those who have long lived together, and worked together, and learned to know one another, come to the parting of the roads. We can no longer travel together: we must go, you to one path, I to the other. To-day is a day which finishes and winds up a large piece in all our lives who have been together so long; finishes all that I have been to you and you to me. It is not indeed that we shall not see one another's faces again; it is not that, I hope. But this is the last time that I shall speak to you

as your clergyman; the last time that you meet to worship with me as my parishioners. A great gap is going to open between you and me for evermore in this world. And we are come to its edge.

We have been together a long time, as we count time here—nearly nineteen years. Those who were the old people when I came are mostly gone. Those who were the middle-aged are become old. The children whom I first baptized, and taught in school, and prepared for confirmation, are now men and women, dispersed, many of them, from the homes where they were born to new ones; some to the ends of the earth. We have lived together through eventful times; the most eventful times which this century has yet seen, even though it began with the great French war, which closed with Waterloo. Here, in our deep tranquillity and peace, while we were from year to year ploughing and sowing, mowing the fields and reaping the harvests, passing from winter to summer and from summer to winter, we heard at a distance the rumours of great wars and the strife and downfall of nations. We remember the winter nights when we thought of our soldiers in the Crimean war, and waited for the news, not knowing what the morning might bring. We were together, and felt the horror, the shock, the agony of the Indian mutiny,—the pity, the shame, the wild thoughts of vengeance which we now hardly like to call back to our recollection. We were living together and working together, as we were last month, when new kingdoms were fought for and founded on the continent of Europe, in Italy, in

Germany, changing its face and its destiny. We looked on with amazement, with perplexity, with divided feelings, but with the deepest interest, at the fiercest and strongest and most obstinate struggle the world ever saw, the four years' civil war in the great state across the ocean, which sprung from our blood, and speaks our language. And now last year you have seen the catastrophe which exceeds all; you have seen what ambition can still do in this world which thought itself so much wiser and more reasonable than of old; you have seen the madness which threw away an empire, and the cruel strength which gained one; you have seen how war is carried on in modern days, with what calm precision and science, with what recklessness of human misery; you have seen what two years ago seemed the proudest and strongest of nations, in the course of a few months beaten down into ruin and shameful anarchy. And you have not only looked on: labouring men gave of their narrow means to help the sick and wounded in this terrible war; labouring men gave of their weekly wages, not once for all, but regularly week by week, for four months, to help their countrymen in Lancashire in the great distress caused by the American War.

These are the times we have lived through together, these are the things we look back to, since we first knew one another.

But these are not the things which are in our remembrance now. In our perfect quiet we yet have had our own changes. We have had much to interest us, to stir and touch our hearts. And in the eyes of Him who counts the hairs of our head, our

interests, and our changes, are of weight; they have been marked and recorded. My thoughts, and I am sure yours also, go back to many solemn and many joyful days; to festivals and weddings and christenings and funerals; to many a happy Christmas, and Christmas Eves, with the lighted church, and the holly leaves, in the dark winter night; to many a glad and peaceful Easter; to many a summer school-feast; to many a blessed Communion together. I think of all the changes in the houses of the parish; who lived in them once, and who fill their places now. I see again the faces which used to be so familiar to me, which have now passed away. I cannot go along a road, through the woods, or across a field, I cannot look out on a prospect, I cannot enter a house, but it brings back something—some bright day, some happy meeting, some fear, some deliverance, some heavy tidings, some summons to me to hasten, in the dark chill morning, or the late night, or the warm summer day,—to some deathbed, to take the last leave before it was too late. How it all comes back, through all these years, as if it was only yesterday, and as if I and you had not so deeply changed! The Sunday services, and the school, and the visits, and the kindly greetings, and the anxieties and the hopes,—yes, and the worries too, and disappointments,—the things I hoped for and could not see.

And now all is over. It is finished and done. Never more in this world will it be as it has been. Other things are before all of us now. For what is past, as far as we are concerned in it, there only remains the judgment.

And yet not only that. There *is* something more. There is, to me at least, the call, the obligation to the deepest and most earnest thankfulness for the choicest and most abounding blessings which God has to give; thankfulness for unbroken peace and happiness; thankfulness that death has not once crossed my threshold, thankfulness for the kindest and most unchanging of friends whom I have met with here; thankfulness that with the poor as well as the rich of my people, and my neighbours, I have been allowed to be on the footing of an equal and a friend, to feel with them, to speak to them, as man with man.

And I have one particular reason just now to feel thankful. I have been here long enough to see, through your goodwill and help, through the munificence and liberality of some of our friends, our church put in order. Three years ago I could not have left it to a successor without feelings of shame. Now, I hope it is not quite unsuitable for the great and holy use for which a church is meant.

But there is something, too, besides thankfulness. In nineteen years, with a people so willing, so ready to listen to me, with such kind hearts, so quickly touched and moved, what might not have been done? And what has been done? What use for our improvement in all good things have we each of us made of the time that we have lived together, almost as one family? These are serious and heart-searching questions, questions, too, which one day we must answer. This is not the time nor the place. But they are not questions to be forgotten in our secret souls, either by you or by me.

Wishes that the time might come over again, hopes that if it were we should make better use of it, are but idle, though they are so natural. But they point to the truth. They are our own witnesses that we have not done as well as we might have done; that we have much to wish otherwise; much undone or done poorly; strength and time wasted; opportunities missed and misused, much to repent of, much to be ashamed of and sorry for. I believe indeed I have cared for you. I have tried, at least I have wished, to seek your good. But yet, with all my regrets at a time like this, mingles very painfully the remembrance of much which it is now too late to attempt to do. If when we have done all we are but unprofitable servants, what must we be when there is so much that we have not done?

And now, for the last time, may I speak as your adviser, and speak plainly. New things are beginning with you in a measure. And I think, too, that your hearts are tender, and that you are feeling that kindliness and sympathy which open, if you will, an entrance to yet higher things. Do not miss this time. It is the time when God is inclining you, is helping you, to be more serious, more impressed with the realities of life, more ready to think of what is past, and of what is to come. Settle with yourselves that with this change you will try to do something more in the way of earnest religious living.

If you have not said your prayers, or have left them off, begin saying them again. If your churchgoing has been irregular, make it steady and fixed. If, able to come twice, you have come but once, do what is right, and begin to come twice. If you have

been indifferent to what the Bible tells you of your Saviour, ask Him now to help and guide you. I say nothing of other things of which you know I have often spoken. But I leave this word with you —a new time is beginning with you. Make a fresh start.

Next, will you suffer me to give you a practical warning? You have been long accustomed to me, to my ways; no doubt, too, to my faults and shortcomings. And being accustomed to things blinds our judgment, and makes us unfair to other things which are different. Will you try and take care not to be so unfair? I need not say how greatly I value your regard, your affection, of which I have had so many proofs. But do not let yourselves make comparisons between the old and the new, at least against the new. Probably you would be wrong. At any rate, there are more right ways than one, and a thing is not right merely because you are accustomed to it. Never forget the temptation which at first may cross you, that if you are not careful and fair you may do injustice to the greatest and most self-devoted earnestness, the deepest love of souls, the purest sense of duty, the warmest love to yourselves, only because they come in a form which is new to you.

I know I have been long to-day, but you will pardon me, for it is my last time, and perhaps I shall never speak to you more—certainly not as your clergyman. And while I can yet speak to you, I have something to ask of you. First, about myself. In so long a time it cannot be but that I must have made mistakes, misunderstood others,

judged harshly, spoken hastily, and, what still more weighs on my conscience, sometimes not spoken when I ought to have spoken, or not earnestly enough. If any of you remember aught of this kind—if I have ever, by fault or unknowingly, hurt any, done them injustice, caused them offence, vexed or troubled them, or in any way done them wrong, I humbly and earnestly beg them to forgive, as if I begged them on my death-bed—and it is not less solemn a parting. And so too, if by any fault of mine I have neglected them; if, when they were wrong, I have not sufficiently warned them; if I have not given them the care I ought to have done, —I pray you to forgive me, and to ask that I may be forgiven,—forgiven for what I know, and, much more, for what I do not know.

And next, about yourselves. In any place, even the smallest, there must be differences and misunderstandings. Wherever there may be such, wherever they have not been healed, and keep neighbours apart, grant me, I pray you, this last favour. Grant me this last request that I have to make to you. Let bygones be bygones. Give me the great consolation of believing that my going away has softened and drawn your hearts one to another; that you feel that we have really been all one together, and that, in this, harsher feelings are lost. You will not be sorry for it when you come to die. To me it will make up for much if I can but hope that I leave behind me kinder thoughts and willingness to forget past differences in those whom I equally care for, and who, for the sake of all, for the sake of Christ their Redeemer, ought to be at one.

And now the end is come. We shall go home to our firesides, never more to meet as we have met this afternoon, as we have met wellnigh every Sunday afternoon for nearly nineteen years. And is not the time short? Have we indeed brought "our years to an end as it were a tale that is told"? It has passed as the days will again pass between this and our last day in this life. "Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening." And the evening, the last evening, is here.

O kind and loving friends, O warm-hearted and attached neighbours, O loyal affectionate hearts, we must be together no more. You have been to me what no other people have ever been to me, what I cannot hope that any others ever will be. There is but one place where again we can be together, and that is not on this side the grave. Here we part for good. O my dear friends, let us look on to that other meeting and being together. Let us wait, and help one another, and remember one another till that meeting comes; it will not be long coming.

How shall I bid you farewell? May we not take the words in which the great Apostle bade farewell to those whom he loved? Can I wish you better than he wished in to-day's Epistle: "For this cause we . . . do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God?"

May I not end with his earnest adjuration? "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good

comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

THE END

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